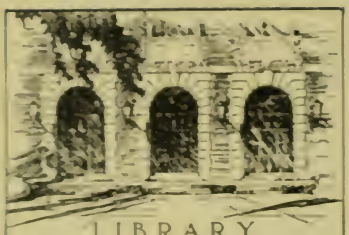
THE NEW ANTIGONE

A ROMANCE



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THE NEW ANTIGONE

THE NEW ANTIGONE

A Romance

Προβᾶσ' ἐπ' ἔσχατον θράσους
ὑψηλὸν ἐς Δίκας βάθρον
προσέπεσες, ὦ τέκνον, πολύ·
πατρῷον δ'ἐκτίνεις τιν' ἄθλον.
Antig. 853-857.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II

London
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CONTENTS

PART II

A MOCK SUN

CHAPTER XV

PAGE
The Meeting of Fair Ladies 3

CHAPTER XVI

La Belle Fille Heureuse, Effarée et Sauvage . 24

CHAPTER XVII

Eavesdropping 40

CHAPTER XVIII

The Celtic King Arthur 74

CHAPTER XIX

PAGE

TABLEAUX VIVANTS 91

CHAPTER XX

WAS NOT THIS LOVE INDEED? 124

CHAPTER XXI

THE ORDINANCES OF THE GODS 141

CHAPTER XXII

EATING THE LOTUS DAY BY DAY 167

CHAPTER XXIII

GO NOT, HAPPY DAY! 187

CHAPTER XXIV

MANIBUS DATE LILIA PLENIS 197

CHAPTER XXV

NEC DIVERSA TAMEN, QUALEM DECET ESSE SORORUM 224

CHAPTER XXVI

IF LOVE BE FREE? 253

PART II

A MOCK SUN

CHAPTER XV

THE MEETING OF FAIR LADIES

IT was natural that Lord Trelingham should ask next morning how Rupert had been led to Falside. And just as natural was it that Rupert should not know where to begin. He would not mention his first encounter with Hippolyta, and was thereby at a loss how to explain the second. He kept, therefore, to the vague and the general. He had never crossed the stream before, and, on the completion of his picture, had been seized with an irresistible desire to spend a morning in the open air and to explore the country which lay across the high and woody banks of Yale. He was not, like his friend Ivor, endowed with a strong local memory, and the mist which came down on the moor obliterated the usual landmarks. While in this uncertainty, Miss Valence, who was riding home, as he supposed, and who might have gathered from his appearance that he was a stranger, came to his rescue. She told him

that he could not reach Trelingham before nightfall, and very kindly offered him shelter and refreshment at her father's house. He might have hesitated had Colonel Valence been at home; but in his absence no subjects were likely to be handled in which a guest at Trelingham could not join, and he had accepted Miss Valence's benevolent offer. At this point Lady May interrupted him. 'Was Miss Valence riding unattended?' So far as he knew, she was.

'She must be an extraordinary young lady,' said the Earl's daughter. 'It is now four or five years since they came to Falside. Miss Valence has no mother, and apparently never had a governess. She has no companion, and but one woman-servant is ever seen about the place. But Miss Valence rides and walks alone where she pleases,—like a man or an American young woman. I have seen her only at a distance. Is she peculiar when you meet her?'

Glanville hardly knew; no, he thought not; he had no opinion, except that Miss Valence seemed to have had more experience of the world than he could have supposed. And here he began to consider how he should give her message to Lady May. Better now than when they were alone. He must speak as not having received any special confidences while at Falside.

'Miss Valence,' he said, not without an inward thrill as he mentioned her name, 'surprised me in some ways. I did not know at first whether she

shared the Colonel's feelings. But it is evident that she does not. Her father, no doubt, sees that she can have nothing to do with his first marriage. At all events,' he went on, directing his words to the Earl, 'she spoke of you, I may say, with affection. Nor is that all. She expressed a strong desire to know Lady May.'

'Did she really?' cried the Countess, who had been listening attentively. 'How amusing it would be to know such an original girl! Do let us call on her, May.'

Her cousin was astonished, not at Karina, who uttered whatever came into her flighty brain, but at the message conveyed by Rupert. She was not prejudiced in favour of Miss Valence. Though her own views were unconventional and her principles daringly unlike those in which, as the daughter of a pious English peer, she had been trained, it did not follow that she approved of 'American manners,' as she called them. Neighbours who remembered Lady Alice's marriage, were slow to mention the Valences when one of the Trelingham family happened to be present. Yet she had heard and seen enough to give her a disagreeable notion of Hippolyta as a bold, hoydenish sort of young person, brought up nobody knew where, and showing in her conduct a complete indifference to the sacred usages of the class to which her father at least belonged. Lady May was capable of breaking with society to gratify a strong inclination; but she was not capable of riding

out without a groom. Those laws of the Medes and Persians which, concerned with slight outward forms, are different in different countries, are yet in each inviolable. Now Hippolyta had never borne their yoke. She could not feel the enormity of the offences she almost daily committed against those which govern Englishwomen. Not a stain could be imputed to her; in word and deed she was white as the driven snow. And yet the mention of her name in any drawing-room within a circuit of a dozen miles was accompanied, on the part of her own sex, with mysterious looks and frowns, which implied that her reputation was a thing of naught. On first coming into the country she was too young to be introduced anywhere; nor did Colonel Valence, who never entered a drawing-room, seek female society for his daughter. She had grown up alone, and seemed not to mind it. But such an eccentric way of life made it impossible that the ladies around should make acquaintance with her now she had reached the age of nineteen. She was excommunicated by universal though tacit consent. She was a social outcast, to be owned by no class of her father's fellow-citizens or their wives. Did she feel it? Was she aware of it even? Impossible to say. If she suffered, neither Colonel Valence nor any of their foreign guests observed her suffering. She went to and fro, or stayed at home and received her visitors, with much the same freedom and straightforwardness which a young man of her own age would have displayed.

Her manners were, in this respect, American. Most certainly they were un-English. Had one of the younger revolutionists that sometimes came happened to interest her in his views, she would have written long letters to him and permitted or enjoined him to answer at equal length, nor imagined that she was indulging an unfeminine intimacy. Assuredly she had not the shadow of a notion that such correspondence implied a promise or prospect of their union for life. As a matter of fact, she had no correspondent except her father; but she might have had a score and Colonel Valence would not have interposed. She did, indeed, write letters at his dictation to all parts of Europe, sometimes in cypher, and often without remembering their contents. These things were not all within Lady May's knowledge, but some of them were; and she could not decide whether the message conveyed by Rupert was a fresh instance of Miss Valence's boldness, or whether she ought to accept it in a friendly spirit. Her first resolution was in the negative. She could not take notice of Hippolyta; it would be every way unbecoming. 'Did you dine at Falside?' she inquired of Rupert. He admitted that he had done so; and further civil questioning made it clear that Miss Valence had presided at the dinner-table. This was dreadful in a maiden of nineteen; how could any lady that respected herself visit such a hardened sinner, such an inexcusable culprit? So reasoned the Earl's daughter on hearing these confes-

sions, although for the honour of her sex she made no remark. Rupert, likewise, came in for his share of censure. But he was only a man, and men are easily led from the right path when women are bold. Call on Miss Valence? no, indeed. But the Countess would not leave her in peace. When she expressed her decision in a brief but energetic sentence, that lady, appealing to the Earl, who tolerated her saucy ways with marvellous good-nature, said, 'Don't you think, uncle, that it is very nice of poor Miss Valence to want May for a friend? She must be a great deal better than her father. I don't like his looks at all. But Miss Valence seems very bright and charming; it is not her fault if nobody calls at such an ogre's castle as Falside. I daresay she does not know what people think. Although,' continued the Countess in a wise tone, 'what people think is often as silly as can be. I know I wish there were not always a servant behind one to spoil things. If I were Miss Valence I should enjoy riding about where I pleased, and doing what I liked.' She spoke with conviction, the lawless creature!

The beginning of this little speech was more persuasive than the end. Lord Trelingham smiled at the first words, and did not attend to the last.

'I incline to think,' he said, with a benignant glance at his daughter, 'that your cousin is not altogether wrong. It might be a kindness to Miss Valence, alone and unfriended as she seems to be, if

you made her acquaintance. You could help her to understand what is expected of a young lady in her position, and perhaps put an end to the isolation in which she lives. What do you say, my dear?'

Lady May was still reflecting on the odd circumstance that Rupert should have dined at Falside. She did not answer immediately. Her affection for the artist had not yet been quickened by jealousy. But she disliked the thought of Hippolyta intervening at that moment. Why could fortune not have waited till Rupert had taken the decisive step? It was a most undesirable incident. If she declined to call on Miss Valence, she must remain in the dark about her so long as Rupert hesitated. There might, of course, be no feelings on either side; but still—— She must gain time to think. 'Would not Colonel Valence make a difficulty?' she inquired by way of answering her father.

'No difficulty to me,' said the Earl. 'I have long resolved that if he or his came with overtures of reconciliation I would meet them half way. There are reasons why I could do no other. Lady Alice's fortune is still in my trust. If she left no children, it should go to her husband.'

Rupert, who had reasons on his side to encourage the intimacy, threw in a word. 'I believe Colonel Valence leaves his daughter free to choose her friends. She said expressly that he would not be displeased at her sending the message I have had the honour to convey.'

'That is strange,' said the Earl. 'I should be glad to think it implied kindlier feelings on his part. But since he said so, you may be sure he meant it. Valence always knew his own mind.'

Nothing more was said just then. A few days passed; and Rupert, still in a dream which was so vivid and absorbing that he hardly wanted to see Hippolyta, went silently to and fro in the Park or spent hours by the sea, his imagination busy on the designs which must be prepared for the Great Hall, his heart musing on its own happiness and inspiring his genius with ever fresh lights. He said little or nothing: but the watchful eye of his hostess caught him smiling often, fantastically, like Malvolio, whom, as I have remarked, most infatuated lovers resemble in their gestures. The change, unobserved by others, could not escape Lady May; but the meaning of it was beyond her. Rupert never uttered Miss Valence's name. Now that the *tête-à-tête* in the picture-gallery had come to an end, these two seldom saw one another alone, and at no time for more than a few seconds. While others were present Rupert stayed; when they went he found a pretext for leaving the room. All this he did unconsciously, not being quite awake. The question whether he had done Lady May a wrong was one that, after the drive from Falside, ceased to trouble him. The truth is that he scarcely thought of her at all. Years of absence could not have made a wider gulf between them than the hours he had passed with Hippolyta,

or in thinking about her since their meeting. He looked neither before nor after. He did not even reflect on the difficulties which might arise should Lady May call on Hippolyta and the innocent Amazon gave an account of her visit to the Hermitage. She was capable of it; but Rupert never heeded.

Fortune favoured him, more perhaps than he deserved. The next time he rowed to the chalet Ivor was at home. Our philosopher had fallen into a habit of spending almost every day by himself, and appeared at Trelingham merely for dinner, being occupied, as he said, in the work which Rupert had given him. Imagine the consternation of the latter when his friend said to him, 'By the bye, an extraordinary thing happened here not long ago.'

'What sort of thing?' said Rupert, looking up from the couch where he lounged away his time on these visits. He was alarmed and nervous at what might be coming.

'Well, I should call it a ghostly visitation,' replied Ivor. 'Do you remember that afternoon you wandered across the moor and got to Falside?'

'Of course I do,' said Rupert impatiently; 'but do go on. That has nothing to do with your story, has it?'

'Nothing; only it fixes the date. I did not return to the Hermitage that evening, as it was midnight when you came home and the notion of walking through the mist was anything but agreeable. I slept in my old room, next to yours. Some little

matters kept me till the afternoon; but I had made up my mind to come back, if only for a short spell, as I had been a whole forty-eight hours in the society of human creatures. So I rowed over about three o'clock. The result was a series of surprises. First, and most extraordinary of all, I found the coracle from the other side lying at the steps.'

'Do you mean,' said Rupert, who felt he must make an effort, 'that you found it in the boathouse on the Trelingham side?'

'No; here at the steps, I tell you. It was most extraordinary. It could not have moored itself; and I ran into the house, expecting to see a visitor, little as I knew who it could be. There was no visitor, although I looked everywhere. If any one came in the coracle he must have flown away again, using wings instead of oars, for there was the boat, and there was not he.'

'A ghost, surely,' cried the other young man, laughing a forced laugh. He remembered his stupidity, and anathematised himself for leaving the coracle behind.

'But was that all?' resumed he, after his laugh was out. 'You talked of surprises.'

'I did,' said Ivor. 'Look at this;' and to Rupert's horror and delight he held up a riding-glove which must have been Hippolyta's. 'I found it on the chair by the door.'

'Let me see it,' said the arch-hypocrite. He took it in his hand. Ah, how much greater was the

mesmeric influence of this poor dead thing than of all the lightnings that shot from the eyes of Lady May! 'Go on,' he murmured dreamily.

'Go on,' echoed Ivor; 'that is all very fine, my dear boy. But what am I to think of finding a glove here?'

'That it was lost by an angel,' said Rupert, still in a trance.

'I don't think it can have been an angel,' answered his friend laughingly; 'at all events, it was not an angel out of the Christian heaven, for it brought me a message from quite another quarter.'

'Brought you a message? Never!' cried Glanville, now thoroughly awake and starting to his feet. Could Hippolyta be in communication with his friend? Impossible!

'But it did, all the same; and that is why my time has been so taken up. I must leave Trelingham in a few days.'

'You don't mean that this glove,' Rupert held it tighter as he spoke, 'has to do with your leaving Trelingham.'

'No; but this piece of paper has.' Ivor, from the table where he was sitting, took up a folded half-sheet of note-paper and held it out. Glanville scanned it eagerly, but could make nothing of it. He turned it upside down with no better result. 'Is it Russian?' he said, 'or what? I never saw letters formed like these, if letters they are.'

'It is a cypher,' replied Mardol, 'and tells me I

must go to London on business.' He looked serious and somewhat downcast.

'I can guess the sort of business,' said the artist; 'but of course I will not ask you about it. Poor Ivor! are you still convinced that you are in the right way?'

'Utterly convinced,' replied he; 'nor is it that which troubles me. But I do not like to leave you so suddenly and with such little prospect of returning.'

'Shall you be absent long?' inquired his friend, feeling sad and yet relieved at the turn things were taking. If it was this errand which brought Hippolyta to the chalet she would not mention it to Lady May.

'I do not know how long. But I daresay several months. You will have to do without me in the Great Hall.'

'And if I want you?' asked his friend. 'You know how miserable I am when you vanish out of sight in this fashion.'

'Write to Grafton Place. One of my working friends will forward my letters.'

'It seems to me,' said Rupert, somewhat bitterly, 'that you trust your working friend more than you do this brother of yours. Why not give me an address where my letters could at once reach you?'

'Rupert, how can you say so?' cried the other, coming up to him and putting his hand on his shoulder. 'You know that in comparison with you I have no friend. This is a matter of duty or

discipline, not of affection. I do not belong to myself. When I am summoned I must go. I shall have no fixed address; in any case I am bound to secrecy.'

'Well, old fellow, I wish you well out of it,' said his friend. 'You ought to belong to yourself; and as for the secrecy which you have promised, it can bode little good to any one. But you must do what you think right.'

'Yes,' replied Ivor, 'I partly agree with you. But I have promised and there's an end on't. What excites my curiosity, however, is the way in which this notice came. I saw, on entering, that my books were not in their usual places, and on looking round I discovered a volume of poetry on the table with this paper showing out of it. Had I not been so hasty in coming in, I might have known there was a message by the marks on the front-door. You look surprised. But they are rubbed out now, and I don't mind telling you that we find it useful to adopt such signals—borrowed, I suppose, from the gipsies. But still, I cannot account for the messenger's getting away.'

'Perhaps he had two boats,' said Rupert, 'and left the coracle to draw your attention.' He could not help laughing as he spoke at the thought of trying to mislead Ivor. The fatal effects of love! He was aware that the relations between Colonel Valence and Lord Trelingham had never been discussed before his friend. Ivor did not know the story of the

Madonna of San Lucar except in general outline, nor until the adventure on the moor had Miss Valence been mentioned. Thus if the young man departed immediately he might never know who had left the missive on his table. Rupert felt certain it was Hippolyta. Her bold visit was now explained ; and the circumstance that she had held a book in her hand when she received him so calmly was decisive. He would have liked to ask whether his friend knew the Valences or anything about them. But it was part of their silent compact never to indulge in personal questions which might involve deceit on Ivor's part. Rupert was in the dark, not as to his friend's convictions, but as to the extent to which they implicated him in dangerous designs. That Ivor would not countenance assassination he felt sure. But there his knowledge ended. So now he did not dare to mention Colonel Valence or his daughter. But Ivor was speaking.

'Bring two boats and leave one ; that is an original idea,' he exclaimed ; 'it would not be unlike the strange being from whom this comes.'

'Then you know the writing?' said Glanville.

'I know it,' replied the other quietly ; 'but I do not know the glove, which ought to be destroyed.' He put forth his unmerciful hand while speaking, and, to Rupert's poignant grief, took the beloved object away. To protest would have been in vain. With sorrowful eyes the worshipper of Hippolyta beheld her divine glove (is it not so the poets call it?) weighted with

a stone and flung into the mere. A ripple on the waters showed where it had gone down, and for half a minute Rupert detested his bosom-friend. But, wise even in despair, he held his peace; and the adored name of Hippolyta escaped not the hedge of his teeth. Ivor, as though he had accomplished a sacred duty, turned the conversation to other things; and his friend when he grew calm believed that the peril on that side was past.

How did it stand on the other, which was Lady May's? When in the evening he returned to Trelingham one of the first to greet him was the Countess Lutenieff, and she did so in the triumphant words, 'We have called on Miss Valence.' The young man's heart beat fast. He thought it was the Countess's doing, and he did not know whether to feel grateful or the reverse. He wished the acquaintance had begun under better auspices. But he was mistaken. Not Karina, but Lady May had proposed to drive over in the afternoon to Falside. This was the outcome of her painful meditations. She would see with her own eyes and hear with her own ears. To linger in suspense was intolerable; it was, indeed, killing her, as she said with the exaggerated language of passion for which, in this instance, ground was not wholly wanting. Once having resolved on the visit, she was restless till it had taken place. To her fevered spirit even the hours occupied in driving to Falside seemed an age. It was a delightfully still afternoon, with that serious unruffled calm over earth

and sea which has the solemnity though not the bitterness of a farewell to things mortal. The trees were bare, the long lanes dry and leafless, the country silent as they drove through it. Lady May, addressing no word to her cousin, sat upright in her furs and looked eagerly onward, as though to quicken the pace at which they were moving. She would have given much to be tranquil, but it was not in her nature; and when the carriage turned at the steep entrance to Falside, she almost wished that she had never undertaken this trying visit. Could any good come of it? But self-control was too much a habit of her life to be shaken even by a meeting with the woman on whose attractiveness or the want of it her future perhaps depended; and only the sharpened attention of Karina could perceive that in shaking hands with Hippolyta she was inwardly agitated.

The supreme powers, indeed, had so ordered it that their first encounter was agreeable. Lady May acquitted herself of a delicate task with grace and courtesy, while the quiet spirit of the afternoon seemed to have passed into Hippolyta. Unaffectedly surprised and pleased with Lady May's kindness, she was not so much the spirited maiden who feared neither to ride alone nor to preside at the dinner-table when her father gathered round it his miscellaneous guests, as the child who is all shyness and gratitude in return for a token of love. With charming simplicity she did the honours of Falside; and

while not apologising for anything in their way of life, she spoke as if taking for granted the peculiarities in her bringing-up and in Colonel Valence's history, which would explain whatever might seem strange. There was not a turn in her speech nor a trace in her bearing that could be deemed unfeminine. The Countess was particularly struck with her; she was so elegantly dressed and looked so beautiful in the shades of colour she had chosen that all idea of a female revolutionist vanished from Karina's mind. If she was learned, she kept it to herself; if unbelieving, as people said, she was certainly not aggressive. Her natural delight on receiving them gained her visitors in no long time, so that a stranger coming in might have taken them for old established callers.

And, pray, what did they talk about? You may well ask, for it was a curiously intimate yet strictly defined conversation. Subjects there were in the minds of all three which, though constantly suggesting themselves, could not be handled. Lady May found it wisest, as it was most natural, to begin with the occurrence that had given occasion to their meeting—Rupert's adventure on the moor. Had the gentleman himself been in company he would have praised Hippolyta's discretion—it was equal to her other adorable virtues. For when, by the tenor of Lady May's discourse, it was evident that he had said nothing at Trelingham of their meeting in the morning, she fell in with Rupert's policy and said as little. This was not because Miss Valence deemed

her conduct unmaidenly; the thought never entered her mind. But if Rupert had not spoken, there was no reason why she should speak. She allowed the story to begin where he told it; and keenly as her visitors examined her countenance while she inquired about him, neither the Countess nor Lady May perceived a change in its exquisite calm or noted in her voice the tremulousness that is born of love. The Earl's daughter began to feel happier; and her cousin, in whose fertile mind a certain plan had been ripening, had to brush away a sense of disappointment when it appeared that Rupert Glanville excited no more interest at Falside than a young man may to whom one has given shelter from the rain. Hippolyta knew nothing of his pictures, and could ask about them in a steady voice. Then she passed to a more important topic,—her own isolation, necessitated, in great measure, by the wandering life of Colonel Valence and the principles on which he regulated his household. It was impossible, she said with a smile, to receive friends who could not forego the convenience of servants, or who would be shocked by seeing their hostess performing what they might deem menial offices. Nor did she complain of her exclusion from the world. She was not without interests; she had travelled with her parents in many parts of Europe; and she had books and a horse. All she wanted besides—she hesitated, and looked in a pleading, affectionate way from one lady to the other—was a friend or two of her own sex, who

might remind her that there were other things as sweet and precious as the service in which she was engaged. Especially, she went on, it had been her desire to know a little of Lady May, to be allowed sometimes to talk with her, and, sooner or later, to help towards healing the feud which had lasted so many years. It was daring, on her part, to make the request which Rupert had conveyed. 'But,' she said, 'you would not blame a poor sailor who was cast away on a desert island for putting up his torn handkerchief as a signal to any ship that came in sight. I had no other way.'

All this was said with extreme modesty and a charm of manner which Lady May had been far from anticipating. Hippolyta's strange beauty dazzled her; while the combination of self-respect with straightforward feeling which appeared in all she spoke, made it impossible to set her down as the unwomanly creature she was deemed in the neighbourhood. She asked for affection. Could it be refused? But while Lady May was reasoning, the Countess had decided. With her birdlike lightness she had flown to Hippolyta, and, kissing her on the cheek, cried out, 'My dear, you are perfectly charming. You may reckon upon us as your friends as long as we live. What a pity we did not begin earlier; but we must make up for lost time, and consider that we have been friends these five years.' Hippolyta returned her embrace, saying in a low, earnest voice, 'How kind this is of you!' But she

still kept her eyes on Lady May, as though the Countess's affection by itself would not suffice. The Earl's daughter had gone too far to draw back. Neither was she disposed to feel uneasy, as before their meeting. She put out her hand and took Hippolyta's with a firm grasp, while she said, 'My dear Miss Valence, I am not much given to making promises, and the Countess knows that I have but few intimate friends. But you may always reckon upon me; and I will do my best to bring about the reconciliation you have at heart. Will you come one of these days and see my father? He will be so glad to see you.'

'Oh,' said Hippolyta, 'these are words to make one happy. I have so wished to speak with Lord Trelingham. I will come whenever you please; and you may be sure that in doing so I have my father's consent. I did not press him at all. He gave it of his own accord.'

On this understanding they parted. Hippolyta promised that she would come to Trelingham for a long day, as soon as her household affairs permitted; and Lady May renewed her assurances that she should be received by the Earl with cordiality. At the gate, to which she accompanied them, Hippolyta underwent a second embrace from Madame de Lutenieff, and again shook hands with the less demonstrative of her visitors. She saw them off, and walked back with thoughtful steps and slow along the terrace, listening to her waterfall as it

leapt merrily down the rocks. Much had been done, but much remained to do. Her purpose in soliciting Lady May's friendship was indeed simply to end the long disagreement between the families. She could not comprehend her father's motive in keeping it up, unless that he fancied the Earl unwilling to be reconciled. But the Earl had relented, according to Lady May; and why should Colonel Valence not do the same? Their political differences were not to the point; they never had met, nor were likely to meet, on this ground. For if Lord Trelingham was a Tory of the purest type, her father represented a programme which at that date no English party would have dreamt of adopting. He despised the politics of the polling-booth, and would have begun his reform by abolishing not only the Crown, but the Houses of Parliament with it. She knew that the two men could never again be friends; why, however, should they continue to be enemies? The waters kept falling with their pleasant ripple, and Hippolyta roamed about her garden till sundown.

CHAPTER XVI

LA BELLE FILLE HEUREUSE, EFFARÉE ET SAUVAGE

SUCH was the event of which Rupert heard from the Countess when he came in; and at dinner she dressed it up in the grotesque fancies suggested by her imagination. She had never seen any one like Hippolyta. She compared her, as the artist himself had done, to a sylph, a creature of romance, imprisoned by Colonel Valence at Falside. They ought not to rest till she was delivered. Glanville laughingly inquired whether a captive sylph was in the habit of riding alone all over the country; and was told in reply that Hippolyta's captivity was moral, not a mere imprisonment of the body. She dressed with remarkable taste for one who had never seen a fashionable gathering; but that might be inspiration like Rachel's, who could have worn a tablecloth as if it were a princess's robe. And her manners, though wild, were beautiful. Therefore she must come out and be made known to civilised

people. The Countess would do her that charity if no one else was willing, for she adored Hippolyta.

'Do you think her a sylph, Lady May?' asked Glanville.

'She seems to me a young lady of most unusual loveliness, and of great intelligence and decision. But I should not call her a sylph, because I don't know what the word means. It is one of those sentimental expressions that my cousin has learnt from her French reading.'

'You are always severe on my reading,' said Karina; 'but we cannot all be philosophers. A sylph is a beautiful creature with great dreamy eyes, and wings folded up in her corset, so that she has only to spread them and she can fly wherever she chooses. Don't you believe that Miss Valence could fly if she liked?'

'She has character enough to do anything,' said Lady May, 'and I am glad to have made her acquaintance. But we shall know more when she comes to Trelingham.'

It was evident that she had not spoken of the Hermitage. Oh, wise Hippolyta, thought Rupert. Now he should see her again; and the secret between them would give him an advantage. All love-making is a contest in which not a little depends on the given odds. Hippolyta was to some extent in his power. And he was no longer in hers—since she had kept silence when to speak might have put him in the wrong.

He watched every day till she came. A whole week moved on at the laggard pace of time when we are expecting something to happen. Ivor finished his work, or at least put it in order for Rupert to finish; packed up his belongings, and said good-bye to the Earl and Lady May with a tranquil mien in which none could have discerned the passionate regrets that filled his heart. Lord Trelingham begged him to come back as soon as he could; the Hermitage would be always at his disposal, and he might rest assured of a hearty welcome. He smiled sadly; no, he thanked them, it was most improbable that he should return. Circumstances, his way of life, imperative engagements, forbade the hope. But he would call on them in town? He did not know; the future was so uncertain. Then Tom Davenant said he must come to Foxholme; and poor Ivor turned away his face because of the shame and emotion that were gathering there. If Tom could only know upon what errand he was departing, the last thing he would have imagined would have been such an invitation. He loved the young man. But they stood ranged on opposite sides in the battle of life; and the trumpet-call which was sounding in his own ears sternly told him that friendship must yield to duty. 'I will come indeed, if I can,' he answered, 'but though I never should, believe that the fault is not mine. We are all creatures of circumstance.' Tom had, therefore, to content himself with the mournful pleasure of driving him to the station, which he did with

exemplary skill, at the same time assuring Ivor that if he would not mind little deficiencies in writing and grammar—his ignorance of which the young man regretted, though too late—he, Tom Davenant, should find solace in corresponding with him. His friend smiled and said how grateful it would make him, adding that, in case he delayed an answer for some weeks, it would mean that he was gone from home. Characteristic of the man I call it, that his sorrow on leaving these two friends, Rupert and Tom Davenant, almost made him forget the love he was renouncing. Nay, he thought more of the new friend than of the old during those days; for he expected to meet Rupert again in London or abroad, but this might prove his last farewell to Tom Davenant. He had lived more than four months at the chalet. It was now November; and the winter of his discontent took from him, or made more piercing, the remembrance of those heavenly days when first he came. Happy if he could forget them altogether! But no, they would be a lifelong regret. Even as the thought crossed his mind he smiled bitterly. Lifelong might not be so very long after all. He was ordered to the front; and those who are to face cannon do not insure their lives at a low premium. He would not disclose to the friend by his side, or even to Rupert, how serious the danger had become; I should rather say, he could not, for they would have hindered his going. But a certain steady light in his eyes and involuntary tension of the muscles betokened the excitement under

which he laboured. 'You are not very well,' said Tom to him; 'can't you wait a few days?' Rupert noticed his mood, was exceedingly gentle with him as on the like occasions in their previous intercourse; but ventured neither to ask a question nor to offer advice. He knew well that Ivor did not brook interference.

So he went away and disappeared into the unknown. Rupert, a few days after, requested that the chalet might be assigned to himself as a studio and general storehouse, for he did not wish to encumber the Great Hall as yet, and his sketches took up room. But he never went across the mere till he had ascertained that Hippolyta would not call in the morning. He was now assiduous in his politeness to Lady May, upon whose spirits a dull tranquillity had fallen, like yellow fog stifling and blinding her. She could not subdue the fascination of being with him; ever when he came into the room the others vanished from her eyes and she looked at him alone, and brooded over his slightest utterances. She did not fear Hippolyta much now; and not to be jealous was comparative happiness. There had come indeed an end of her confidences and of his listening to them. But when would he declare himself? For he was surely bound by what had passed.

It was a lovely morning when Hippolyta appeared at Trelingham, in a low chaise which she drove herself, while the silent old groom or gardener sat behind.

She had come to spend the day, but not to dine; for she said in her note that they must excuse her shyness if she felt tempted to fly away again as soon as she found herself inside the Court. Glanville, who had been lingering since breakfast about the gate by which she was to enter and saw her drive by, himself lying close in ambush, ran along other pathways up to the house, and the moment he decently could sauntered into the morning-room where the three ladies were seated. That he blushed like a very young man on meeting those brown eyes need hardly be said; and if Hippolyta's countenance did not put on exactly the same shade of crimson, it may have been simply because hers was a pale ivory cheek and his was rather swarthy. They were both a good deal embarrassed, which Lady May ascribed to the circumstances of the adventure which had made them acquainted. She said to herself that Miss Valence, though she had sinned against propriety on that day, had done so ignorantly, while Rupert was often confused on coming into a room. They talked until the Earl came about the scenery of Trelingham Park, which Hippolyta did not know except on the outskirts. And the artist sat and gazed at her. She was more beautiful than ever. Lady May, whom he could now contrast with his divinity, seemed a majestic woman, allied to the dangerous creatures of forest or jungle in whose composition there is more fire than light. But Hippolyta did not belong to earth. Fervent she might be in her

feelings, quick to speak and to move; her beauty was not childlike, nor did it appeal merely to the softer passions of pity and tenderness; but there was about her, all the while, an innocent directness, a virginal simplicity, which made of her 'a thing enskied and sainted.' When she answered Lady May her voice had in it a tone of great affection, which changed to something bright and sparkling if the Countess addressed her. But it was clear that she listened, even while joining in the conversation, for a step that happily was not long delayed. Every minute she had looked towards the door in anxious expectation; and when it opened and the Earl of Trelingham came in, walking with the feeble gait which was growing habitual with him, she rose at once and ran to meet the old man. He took both her hands in his, and, clasping them affectionately, led her towards the window. There was little need to say that he welcomed her; his emotion proved it better than words. After scanning her face eagerly in silence, he let go her hands, and said, 'You do not remind me of your father, my dear child. But so many years have elapsed since I knew his features well, that I may perhaps be mistaken. It is equally brave and kind of you to pay me this visit. My daughter has told you, I am sure, how glad we are to see you and what a hope we have that this may be the beginning of better things.'

'I know,' answered Hippolyta, 'and I wish I could help more in the matter than, I fear, is within my

power. Of one thing pray let me assure you, for I am certain of it,' and she stopped as if for permission.

'Go on, my dear,' said the Earl; 'do not be afraid if you have anything to say.' He too seemed overcome by her great beauty and simple ways.

'What I want to tell you,' she said, 'is that my father has often spoken your name of late years, and never without affection. I cannot imagine why he has kept, and still keeps, aloof from his old friends; but there is no ill-feeling in it, of that I am convinced.'

'Thank God,' said the Earl, 'thank God! It is all I want,—to forget the past, which cannot be undone, and die in peace with all men. As regards your father, I did for a long while allow a feeling of resentment to come between him and me. It may have seemed unjust in his eyes that any one should have contested his rights as a father over the issue of his first marriage. But I went by the advice of others and my own conscience. However, my poor sister is dead, and you are Colonel Valence's only child, and it is time the past was buried.'

'My father has hardly ever mentioned Lady Alice in my hearing,' replied Hippolyta. 'It was almost by accident that I knew of his former marriage, and for months after coming to Falside I was ignorant that we lived near her family. My mother told me when she was very ill. I am like my mother. She was Spanish, and could not bear the English climate, although she did her best not to let my father see the harm it was doing her.'

'Was your mother Spanish?' inquired the Earl. 'Then, perhaps, she brought you up in her religious views.' Rupert waited with some curiosity for the answer.

'My mother did not bring me up at all,' said Hippolyta; 'she was an invalid most of her time. My father taught me all I know.' She spoke with composure, and seemed to have said all that she thought necessary. Lord Trelingham was too well bred to pursue the examination. His melancholy looks, indeed, bore witness to what he feared would have been the result. He blamed Colonel Valence, but it was impossible to blame his daughter; and the sad spiritual condition of so lovely and innocent a creature filled him with indignation, which went far to counteract his previous desire to condone the past. Meanwhile, Karina, whose eager spirits made her sometimes inconsiderate, inquired of Hippolyta, 'Do you never go to church then? I don't think your father does, at least in the country.'

Lord Trelingham, with some severity in his tone, interposed. 'My dear Karina,' he said, 'you must really not cross-examine Miss Valence. These are matters of conscience, about which we have no right to be curious.'

But Miss Valence was not offended. She replied at once to the Countess. 'I have been in some of the great churches abroad, when there was no service going on. But otherwise I do not know what is done in a church. My father did not teach me religion.'

This remarkable declaration, made in her natural voice, which was gentle and sweet, came upon her hearers like lightning from a clear sky. It startled them, although every one present had supposed it already. But there are so many things we know yet could not venture on putting into words. The Earl was inexpressibly pained; Lady May looked across at Glanville to see what effect this confession would have on him; and the Countess felt frightened, as though a snake had turned under her hand and bitten her. Rupert moved uncomfortably in his chair. It was a shock to him, certainly. He would have said, in the abstract, that with these matters women had nothing to do; they ought to keep to the religion in which they were born and leave speculation to the philosophers. But when his eyes fell on the beloved features again the discomfort vanished. Hippolyta sat, a picture of quiet beauty, untroubled by the momentary silence which had followed her declaration, and perhaps too little acquainted with the ways of the world to comprehend how much it had astonished them. She said 'My father did not teach me religion' as she would have said, had it been the fact, 'I was born blind.' She was not aggressive or defiant, but natural and innocent. Thus it came to pass that even Lord Trelingham's horror, which was exceedingly great, yielded to compassion, and he thought it more than ever expedient to make her at home among good Christians who might enlighten her.

But lest that terrible niece of his should ask more questions, he turned the conversation to Miss Valence's knowledge of the Continent, and they were soon deep in the comparative beauties of the Alps and the Apennines. Her parents, it was evident, had wandered fast and far, seldom staying long in one place, and never making the acquaintance of great families unless some member of them happened to be 'tainted with democratic opinions,' as Lord Trelingham would have called it, or, in Colonel Valence's phrase, 'enlightened and liberal.' There was something even slightly ridiculous in the way that names came up between the Earl and the young lady. If he mentioned a noble house, she often knew it; but when he went on to describe the august head thereof or his equally august consort, Hippolyta had never seen either, and owed her familiarity with the name to a scapegrace or scientific young man, the grief of his parents, who had served with Garibaldi in Sicily, or was famous in the Cretan or the Polish rising. Lord Trelingham bore it very well; this he had expected; and much as he might deplore the associations in which Valence had brought up his daughter, there were too many great Englishmen on that side to allow of unmitigated censure in the instance before him. The Earl was by no means liberal, but he was something which is perhaps as commendable in a world where we cannot have all we should like,—he was good-natured, and quite incapable of identifying individuals with the doctrines

they held. He therefore listened with patience and a degree of interest to the remarks, which were rather pointed than voluble, of Hippolyta on those revolutionary young men whose pedigree he knew in Lombardy and Languedoc. He was led to speak of his own travels, which had been extensive; but, interrupting himself suddenly in the midst of his recital, he asked whether Miss Valence had ever been in Spain. Yes, she told him, once, on the side of Barcelona. And Seville, did she know that picturesque city? She had not been there, nor had her father mentioned his early campaign in its neighbourhood. Then she knew nothing of the Madonna of San Lucar? Nothing whatever, she replied. He was astonished that so striking an incident of his first travels had not been a favourite theme of Colonel Valence's. However, it might help to soften him still more if he learned how narrowly the picture had escaped destruction. He would perhaps be touched on hearing it; for the sight of the portrait long ago had affected him powerfully and even brought him, one might say, from Spain to Trelingham.

Herewith the Earl invited Hippolyta to follow him to the gallery upstairs. She rose, nothing loth; and as he evidently wished the rest to accompany them, a general move was made. The Countess, again interposing as they went along, asked Hippolyta whether she knew what kind of picture was about to be shown her. The young lady, turning half round on the stairs, answered that she supposed it would

resemble those she had noticed in the great collections on the Continent. 'You must not imagine,' she added innocently, 'that I have not studied the Christian mythology. I cannot say, indeed, that I am familiar with all its details.' Glanville fell back a step on hearing this language, and Karina did not open her mouth again for some time. She was daring herself, but she knew that ordinary people did not speak in this way; and again the simile of the snake occurred to her. Lord Trelingham was either deaf or preoccupied, and took no heed of the remark. Perhaps he was thinking how he could make the history of the picture brief yet intelligible; for, when they arrived before it, he began at once to run over the main points as we know them. He said nothing of Valence's motives for leaving England, nor of what followed when he came back to Trelingham. But how much of his narrative did the stranger apprehend? She stood like one spellbound, first eyeing Lady May and then lost in the magnificence and glory of the painting. The Earl ceased to speak, and there was a long silence, during which Hippolyta steadfastly gazed at it, never turning her head, with the expression of one who would learn a thing by heart. By and by she glanced towards Lady May, and going up to her, said in a whisper, 'Is not that your portrait? And when did you live in that wonderful world?' The question was extraordinary, but Hippolyta seemed in earnest. Lady May smiled with a feeling of anguish; she still felt the

distance between herself and that ideal of heavenly innocence.

'The picture was painted long ago,' she replied, 'from an ancestress of mine. I sat to Mr. Glanville when it was restored; that is all.'

'And so,' Hippolyta said, 'it is only a piece of imagination. But how beautiful it would be if we could believe that somewhere in the heights or the depths there was a perfect human creature, one of ourselves, a woman, like this! Do you suppose there can be?' she asked of Lady May.

'I do not know,' was the answer, given somewhat impetuously; 'the medieval Christians thought so, as the Spanish and Italian peasants do still.'

'Yes,' said Hippolyta; 'I used to hear them sing and speak of the Madonna, and I called it, as my father did, mythology. But I was never so impressed with a painting as I am with this. I should be glad if it were a true vision. And yet we all say it cannot be. The peasants have their beautiful things to believe in, and the philosophers have none. That is what I am always hearing at home. It makes me sad when I think of it. If the truth is not beautiful, what is the good of it all?' She looked round, expecting some one, as it should seem, to answer. But they were too much astonished at such curious words on the lips of one so young.

'Such questions are not fit for you,' said Glanville, coming close to her. 'If you had lived with other young ladies you would not think of them. I, at any

rate, believe that all true things, in the long run, will be found beautiful as well.'

'Then you disagree with my father?' she said inquiringly.

'I disagree with all gloomy creeds,' he answered. 'But come away, and do not look at the picture again if it distresses you.' Lady May listened; she heard something in his voice of which she did not approve.

'Oh, it does not distress me; on the contrary,' exclaimed Hippolyta, 'it would keep me looking at it all day. And at last I should beg the wonderful figure to open its lips and speak. What grieves me is, that with colours and a piece of linen you can express so much beauty—at so little cost—and yet the resources of the infinite cannot make this real.'

The Earl put in his quiet word. 'If you wish, my dear child, to believe it real, there is nothing to prevent you. I believe it in my own way; so do the multitude of Christians, and not the peasantry alone. But come, as Mr. Glanville says, for you are too susceptible, I see, to sudden impressions.'

She left the picture unwillingly, and looked back more than once as they went to the door. The incident had shown her in a strange and amiable light which endeared her to the heart of Lord Trelingham; while Rupert, mindful of his own enthusiasm when restoring the Madonna of the Seraphim, said to himself that this highly poetic temperament had at once seized its meaning and reality—a result which

only days of study had brought about in him the sensitive artist. Hippolyta was peculiar; but where in heaven or earth could he find a more exquisite creation?

When, by and by, she spoke of returning to Falside, and the Earl was taking her to the pony-chaise which had been brought round, that kind-hearted old man said to her, 'It was a great grief to me that Lady Alice left no children; but, although you are not my niece in blood, I trust you will always look upon me as your sincere friend, and come to Trelingham often. Your father and I were boys together, and I can never forget him.'

CHAPTER XVII

EAVESDROPPING

THREE months passed quickly by, the happiest in Rupert's life. Winter by the Western Sea is often wild and stormy; the days have little light in them, and the moist vapour filling the air seems to cling heavily about one, while hour after hour the rain-clouds creep along the sides of the valleys or hang on the wooded ridges above them. It is a monotonous, dull-eyed season, the least favourable that can be imagined to inspiration; and only a brave spirit will bear up against it or keep alert under its stupefying influence. But the brave spirit was there. If light grew scant outside, and work went on slowly in the Great Hall, a radiance was kindling within the artist's fancy which became larger every day, adding an energy to his step, a charm to his voice and expression, and for the while utterly doing away with the melancholy that used to haunt him. When he was called to his London studio, as happened

more than once, he went regretfully, stayed the shortest possible time, and ran back again like a boy escaping from school over the palings. He came to be looked upon almost as a member of the Trelingham household; and, in turn, he seemed to love everything in and about it. His unequal humour gave place to a cheerfulness which was willing to amuse and to be amused. Nothing could ruffle him; and Lady May, in spite of herself, caught the infection of his high spirits, while Tom Davenant declared that if all artists resembled Glanville they were not half-bad fellows. The Earl, though no judge of character, became ever more thankful that Providence, through his daughter's suggestion, had put him in the way of a great painter and most agreeable companion, who knew how to observe the delicate line of conduct traced out for him by circumstances. Rupert's behaviour was, I must say, perfect; he kept his distance, did not ask or encourage sentimental conversations on the part of Lady May, and displayed towards her and the Countess a courtesy in which it would have been impossible to strike a shade of difference. If he had in any way presumed, here to a reasonable mind was satisfaction.

The secret of his content lay near at hand. For the first time in his life he was in love. He saw Hippolyta when she visited Trelingham; he met her by chance as she rode out, and watched her footsteps along the sands where, on bright afternoons, she sometimes walked. He professed an ardent desire

to know the tracks over the moor which lay on the other side of Yale; and his explorations naturally took him up the course of the stream, if only to admire in its winter glory the cascade from which Falside derived its name. At this time of the year he found it more romantic, and the flood of waters more plenteous, than he had expected. It was, indeed, not the season for out-door sketching; yet an hour of fine weather would come occasionally, and he transferred to his portfolio a number of rapid and, it must be allowed, masterly views in which the water-fall dashed and foamed over its moss-grown rocks, and the bare trees bending over it added grandeur to the scene. Hippolyta's garden, lying on the hillside and green as an Alpine meadow, could not well be omitted; nor a gable of the cottage, although it stood back from the cascade, and was visible only at one point of sight. The young lady was not always at home when these sketches were taken; but Rupert, who, like all artists, had something of the gipsy in him, would go up at the back of the cottage and humbly demand from old Dolores, the nurse or housekeeper, a glass of milk to quench his thirst. Dolores saw him about the place, and did not mind; while his petition, delivered in a matter-of-fact tone and without hesitating, seemed to imply that it was customary. She gave the milk and said nothing about it to her mistress. But as he happened once to be standing at the door in his vagrant attitude, taking slow draughts of that beverage, Hippolyta came

running out in quest of Dolores, and on seeing him changed colour and looked confused. She drew back, and tried to cover her confusion with a laugh; but it did not serve, and she had to look another way while she begged him to come into the house and rest for a few moments. No, he would not do that; but would she deign to criticise the sketch he was making of the waterfall in this rainy light? He could not satisfy himself that it looked natural, and the opinion of one who had seen the cascade at all hours would be of service to him. Hippolyta was always ready to be of service to anybody; she threw on a shawl, and went down the steep pathway which led to the water's edge. Rupert, all thanks and eagerness, made her observe the clear yellow light that was filling the sunset heavens, how it spread above the waterfall and irradiated the high branches and slender tracery over their heads, throwing a tawny reflection from the opening to their left upon the pure white foam which crowned the falling torrent. Then he showed her what he had made of it; and she, who could find nothing to criticise,—for it was an admirable sketch,—praised it and him, of course in his artistic capacity, which resulted on his part in a momentary fit of intoxication. She knew the waterfall in all its aspects, and was beguiled into talking about them, even leading him to an upper walk where he might see how the Yale formed its tiny rapids ere it plunged down the rocks. Glanville hearkened respectfully, took out his pencil and dashed down a line or two, declared that

she was endowed with the eye of an artist and ought to take lessons in painting, and would have lingered till nightfall had not Hippolyta quietly observed that she must go back to her bread-baking or the batch would spoil, and sped away like a roe-deer, leaving him the helpless victim of her charms. He could not but come again and complete the sketch. Hippolyta saw him from her window as he sat in front of the waterfall. She hesitated a while, and then went down through the garden, and gave him a commission for Lady May. This little action took no time to speak of, and Hippolyta returning to the house was seen no more by Rupert. Yet he walked to the village where he had left his horse, and rode on to Trelingham in a state of singular happiness. He rehearsed his commission openly and unabashed; if Lady May had an answer to send he could take it, for he was going the same way to-morrow. And it became an understood thing that Glanville intended to exhibit a landscape, in which the cascades of the Yale would be introduced, during the course of that year.

At Trelingham, in spite of her untutored ways, Hippolyta was everybody's favourite, unless I am to except Lady May. She came often, as the Earl desired; and her bearing was so frank and gentle that even the censorious neighbours, who were shocked when they heard that she had been 'taken up' by Lady Alice's brother, began to admit that Miss Valence, though a perfect savage in her habits, was

interesting. Not, indeed, that many of them came across her. She begged hard to be introduced as little as possible, and saw only those chance visitors from whom she could not get away in time. When she was thus held captive she spoke hardly at all, but her silence showed that she was attending, and more than one imposing and frivolous matron found in Hippolyta's dumbness a check upon the 'pribble prabble,' to use Fluellen's excellent phrase, which passes current as 'society talk,' and is thought the proper subject-matter of a morning call. Poor Hippolyta, she was much to be pitied! She did not mean to be silent; she was overwhelmed at the kind of conversation on which people fed their minds. Was the great world, which gave laws to the rest of mankind, and boasted of its blood, and wealth, and intellect, so like that deafening house which she had once entered in the Zoological Gardens where parrots and cockatoos scream all day long, and each bird sharpens its beak on iron wire? Most of the ladies, she thought, and Tom Davenant would have agreed with her, had very hard mouths. For want of practice she could not vie with them, and she sat and listened in blank amazement.

But she had been taught to observe, and she perceived that the inmates of Trelingham Court were unlike their visitors. She said to Glanville, whom she often found at her elbow when she turned round to make a remark, 'It is curious what an unworldly air comes over this place when callers are shut out,—

I mean the other callers besides myself. I suppose you, Mr. Glanville, are the nearest approach to a man of the world under this roof, and you would not take a prize,' she concluded, smiling at him in a way he did not think of resenting.

'You are quite right,' he said; 'I hope I shall never win much in that competition. Neither is the Earl an example of what you mean, nor Mr. Davenant. But women of the world now, do you discover none? Lady May, for instance.'

'No; Lady May's position requires her to seem like the rest; but it is all surface. She plays her part because it has been given her, but she is too noble, her gifts are too splendid for it. Like you, she has the genius of an artist, and should be a musician, or write poetry, or do something extraordinary.'

'And the Countess?'

'Oh, the Countess!' said Hippolyta, laughing; 'the Countess is not so much a woman of the world as I am. She is an amusing, a captivating child. There is not malice enough in her composition to make a woman of the world.'

'Not malice, certainly,' thought Glanville, 'but mischief. I am not always pleased with her affection for Hippolyta. However enthusiastic, I doubt that it is quite so simple as it appears.' In which philosophic inference, not communicated to Miss Valence, but the fruit of observation, we shall perhaps see that Rupert was justified.

The only drawback to his contentment was that

Ivor did not write; while if Hippolyta was not always happy, she ascribed it, in Lord Trelingham's hearing, to the fact that her father had sent only a laconic message when she told him of her new friends, to the effect that she might please herself in the matter. He subjoined, it is true, a hasty postscript, but it contained merely these words, 'You know that I bear no resentment towards Lord Trelingham.' This was not all she wanted by any means; although the Earl, resolved upon looking at things in a Christian light, took it as a concession and bade her not lose heart. He did not inquire where Colonel Valence was; and though she wrote frequently, she neither spoke of his doings nor expressed anxiety for his return. No one could suppose that she did not love her father; but, though impressionable, her nerves had been schooled from the first, and the Colonel's uncertain and wandering life was too familiar an experience to make her uneasy. Still, she was alone in the world,—a perilous situation for a maiden of nineteen. Adviser she had none; her Spanish relatives, if such existed, did not come within reach of her; nor were the Trelingham family, however amiable, of the kind to influence one who had been educated on principles which the Earl abhorred, and which Lady May, in spite of her varied accomplishments and real intellect, could not have understood. It can hardly be questioned, indeed, that if Lord Trelingham had realised how far they were from being abstract theories, and what a bearing they had on life, his

compassion for Hippolyta would have been vanquished by his dread of their contagion. Rupert was destined to know a little more of them.

It was that difficult time of day, for an artist in a country-house, which begins somewhere about four o'clock in winter and lasts till the dinner-bell puts an end to it, when Glanville, who had been at work in the Great Hall since morning, and felt so tired that he did not know what to do with himself, entered the many-windowed drawing-room which was then empty, and walking across its wide expanse, threw himself into one of the cushioned embrasures where he could lie at ease and look out at the sea beyond. An immense wood-fire was burning on the hearth, and Rupert, to get away from the blaze, had chosen a window as far from it as possible, drawing the heavy velvet curtains about him so as to be screened and comfortable. He soon grew tired of watching the misty waters ; his eyes closed, and the young man fell into an innocent and refreshing sleep. How long his slumber continued is immaterial to the story; but it was broken in upon by the sound of voices at no great distance, and as he slowly came back to himself he heard an animated conversation sustained by the three ladies, who, though not resembling the withered hags of fable, were weaving his destiny among them. It was dark on the terrace ; but through the aperture of the curtains he could observe the flickering light of the wood-fire and the figures seated near it,—Lady May with a cup in her hand, sitting upright and addressing

Karina, who was in the act of laying a book on the sofa where she half reclined. Hippolyta, buried in the depths of a huge arm-chair, was looking straight into the flames, but, as her expression showed, had an ear for the discussion that was going on. Animated it certainly was; with less refinement of manner it would have appeared a downright quarrel. Lady May was speaking.

'You said the other day, Karina, that I was severe upon your reading. That would be absurd in me. But I do think your uncle would be scandalised if he saw this kind of literature in the hands of any woman.'

'Oh, Uncle William is so precise,' cried the Countess, 'he would not read such a book himself, of course; but he belongs to a past generation when English people read nothing but the Prayer-Book and the *Quarterly Review*. Why shouldn't I read anything that is clever? Besides, this is not one of the new romances. It is an old favourite of mine. Everybody in France knows Rousseau's *Confessions*, or knows about them. What do you say, Miss Valence? You, of course, read everything.' She looked at Hippolyta, who did not stir, but replied:

'What does your cousin say? That is of more consequence than my opinion.'

'I say,' answered Lady May very decidedly, 'that no woman can read the French literature of the last century and not be degraded.'

'Then you have not read it yourself?' said the Countess, in a tone of mocking inquiry.

'Not much; but I know many, both men and women, that have, and whether they admire it or no, they are agreed as to its character. What good can it do you, Karina?'

'What good? it amuses me. It tells me all kinds of things I want to know,—how people dressed, and talked, and ate, and travelled, and made love, and ran away from one another, a hundred years ago, and ever so much more. It must have been a very pleasant world, not like these horrid days when if you do anything it is put in the papers. And I adore sentiment, and virtue, and humanity, and all those things. I wish we could have a *Petit Trianon* and they would let me keep cows, as Marie Antoinette did.'

'What tinsel and paste!' said Lady May indignantly. 'Yes, sentiment and virtue in the mouth of Rousseau were indeed exquisite. But how can you talk in that idle way about their love-making! There was no such thing as love in the eighteenth century.'

'Paul and Virginia?' objected Hippolyta, still keeping her eyes on the fire.

'Yes, in romance I grant. And Lotte also was a reality when she cut bread and butter for the children; but Werther was not when he wept and raved about her—he was only Goethe the sentimental, describing his fancies, which were the one kind of love he had experienced or knew anything about.'

'I agree with you there,' said Hippolyta; 'all Goethe's love-making was sentimental egoism; like the Spectre of the Brocken it reflected himself.'

'And Jean Jacques, what do you think of him?' inquired the Countess.

'I have read him too little to form a judgment. That book on the sofa I began one day, but I could not go on with it. I felt—it is hard to give another the exact impression—as if, then, I had been imprisoned in a hot-house, with strange flowers all round, the odour of which was sickening and a deadly poison. I should not like to breathe such a moral atmosphere long.'

'How very astonishing!' exclaimed Karina; 'you talk like one of the good people, like my uncle, almost. I thought you did not mind such things.'

Hippolyta looked round now. She was very much hurt. 'I mind them a great deal,' she said; 'why do you think I do not mind them? I have never given you reason.' She spoke very sorrowfully, not as if she were angry or insulted.

'My dear child,' the Countess cried, 'I am so sorry to have hurt your feelings. I don't mind things when I read them. But as you were brought up without religion, I fancied you would not be prejudiced against Jean Jacques, like my cousin.'

'Prejudiced! no,' said Hippolyta, 'that I am not. Personally, I have an affection for him, his life was so miserable and he seemed made for better things. Jean Jacques was not irreligious, even in your sense. But, as for my education, I see you do not understand what it has been. Shall I tell you?'

'Do,' said the Countess; and 'only as much as

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you choose,' said Lady May. They were both interested; but Lady May was somewhat doubtful as to the propriety of revelations which, innocent enough on the lips of Miss Valence, might confirm the Countess in her evil ways.

'It will not be so dreadful, I hope,' said Hippolyta with a smile at Lady May. 'I have been taught on principles unlike your own, perhaps, but I have never done anything that I knew to be wrong. My days have gone by harmlessly. So now I may begin "The Story of Hippolyta Valence, told by herself." There is no need of an introduction.'

Thus far the listener behind the curtain had felt assured that he should only terrify a peaceful company of ladies by appearing in their midst from his place of concealment. But now he was in a frightful dilemma. To escape unobserved was impossible, to stay where he found himself was still more impossible. He looked across at the doors. They might as well have been a thousand miles off; neither to the one nor the other could he get without passing the ladies who occupied that side of the room in force. He thought, as desperate men will, of impossible alternatives—of opening the heavy window, and getting out on the terrace; but that, too, meant noise and discovery. If only it had been the French window lower down! There is a fate in these things. Instant decision alone could save him, and to decide instantly was out of the question. Hippolyta had begun; he did not know what to do; he must remain

there imprisoned and trust to a kindly Providence to interpose in his favour. Some one might come in, or the ladies might depart without knowing they had had an auditor. He closed his eyes, but sleep would not come, even if, which I take leave to doubt, it had been seriously invoked. After all, Rupert was human; he had resolved that Hippolyta should be his, and nothing he might hear would shake his resolution. These confidences must have come after marriage; there was no great harm in hearing them before. Thus he argued, listening the while to Hippolyta's voice, which sounded in his ears like an evening bell in the distance, full of dreaming melody. For even now he was not thoroughly roused, though sleep had fled from him.

'I was born,' said Hippolyta, 'in Spain, not far from Barcelona, where, as I mentioned to Lord Trelingham, my father and mother lived for some time after their marriage. They were devoted to one another and to me. My mother had little or nothing, however, to do with my education. She was not strong, and her friend or servant—but we do not call any one a servant in our way of speaking,—her friend, therefore, Dolores, took charge of me and taught me all she knew as soon as I was capable of learning. She had never been out of her native country, and her ways were primitive enough, as I saw by comparison with those of English people when I came across them. But this advantage they had, I could have lived among the peasantry in whose neighbour-

hood I spent my earliest years with no less comfort and happiness than any of their daughters. I know the use of right hand and left; I can take care of myself and am not afraid to live alone or to go anywhere I wish. It was, indeed, the main principle of my father's teaching that a woman who needed service or attendance was no better than a child. He thought Nature had made us free by giving us eyes and brains and a pair of hands; that it is an evil custom which, by degrading women to be mere playthings and ornaments, has enslaved men. He was an ardent admirer of Shelley, and like him he preached the emancipation of the whole human race.'

'An admirable thing,' said Lady May; 'but how did he propose to accomplish it?'

Hippolyta answered immediately, 'By making the two sexes equal and free.'

'I should like that, indeed,' exclaimed Karina; 'but the men are too strong for us, and not easily persuaded. They like their wives to be dependent on them for everything.'

'The new creed finds a short way out of that difficulty, at any rate,' said Hippolyta with kindling cheeks. 'If marriage is slavery, if it cannot be reformed, it must be abolished.' The Countess looked horrified.

Lady May beckoned to her cousin to keep still. 'Karina is interrupting you with her questions,' she said, 'but we can ask questions afterwards. Your own story is what we should be most interested in hearing now.'

'I will go on with it,' said Hippolyta. 'As I was remarking, my father held by the equality of the sexes, and would have their education assimilated in most things. The boys should be taught not to live like barbarians; the girls to use their limbs and their understandings. He would have them frequent the same schools and rival one another in study. I dare-say you know that he was a Greek scholar at the University of Cambridge. He loved to throw his principles into the shape of the antique stories; and thus he often warned me that he meant to give me the training of those heroic women, the Amazons, who called themselves "equal to men." That is how I came by my name Hippolyta. My mother said I should never be tall enough to suit such a splendid appellation, and wished me to be called Titania, which is perhaps the prettier of the two.'

'And did you go to school abroad?' asked Lady May; 'you must have gone to America for the mixed education Colonel Valence wanted.'

'No, we lived such an unsettled life. Besides, my father would not have sent me to a boarding-school. I learned all that was necessary at home. My father instructed me in books of every kind; he taught me history, and gave me an enthusiasm for the great movement in which he was playing so many parts. And my mother, lying on her couch, could show me how to make my own dresses, which I have always done since.'

'You wonderful being!' said the Countess. 'I

thought you must have gone to a very good *couturière ;* but it was your mother, I suppose.'

'I do not think she could ever have had the money,' replied Hippolyta ; 'she was a poor girl of Barcelona, whose father was shot by my father's side on the barricades ; and that was how he came to know her first, having to inform her as gently as he could that she was an orphan. I liked to hear my mother tell the story over again, and often asked her for it. Poor dear mother, I miss her every day I live !'

Glanville did not scruple about listening now. He felt touched to the heart. Hippolyta was not crying, but her subdued tones were full of pathos ; and as if the last words had stirred recollections which she could not trust herself to utter, she became silent for two or three minutes, while the Countess and Lady May exchanged glances of surprise. Here was a revelation. Miss Valence was a gentlewoman, then, only by courtesy; for her father had renounced his station and her mother had none to renounce.

'Yes,' she resumed, 'I am of the people, and am proud to inherit from my mother an affection for them, which has been my chief happiness. She could not read or write ; she had never gone to school and did not know what was meant by the word history. But she could sing the ancient ballads and songs of the peasants which are all the history Spain possesses, and I learnt to sing them from her. She had only one religion—my father ; he was to her all that the world could bestow of brave or admirable ; and that

idolatry came natural, as you may suppose, to me. He was often serious, never harsh. He showed me the meaning of poetry, gave me large freedom, and brought into play as early as possible the powers of reason and conscience, not of fear, servility, or custom. The time must arrive, he said, when I should have only myself to depend on. He would not leave me the property which had been his; it was to be thrown into the common stock of the brotherhood. So that unless hand or brain could support me I should fare ill.'

'But that is monstrous!' exclaimed Lady May; 'what, to leave his only child a beggar! Excuse my vehemence,' she added, 'I see you do not agree with me.'

'I partly understand you, but how *could* I agree with you, my dear Lady May? I shall not be a beggar whilst I have myself. Were I helpless in mind or body, the question would be different. For such cases provision is to be made in the new order of things.'

'But, positively, you are living in Utopia,' said the Earl's daughter; 'cannot you see that these are the idlest dreams? Does Colonel Valence hope to pull the world together at its four corners?'

'I suppose you would describe it so,' answered Hippolyta. 'My father believes in a moral dynamite which will leave only such things standing as reason cannot overthrow. Whatever ought to succumb will succumb. Else we should be governed by dead men

who have lain in their graves for thousands of years. Regeneration springs out of the depths; it will be the people's doing.'

'But, anyhow, it will not come yet,' persisted Lady May, in whose eyes the frantic delusion of the whole business was heightened by Hippolyta's composure. 'Come it will not in our time, and how are you, and such as you, to live?'

'As for me, I am better able to make my way without assistance than nine girls out of ten. I can scrub the floor, and blacklead stoves. I can set type. I can speak and write a certain number of languages, and make my own dresses. Can you do as much, Countess?' she asked with a pleasant glance towards the reclining beauty.

'Heaven forbid!' said the Countess. 'I can speak like a parrot any language I hear spoken about me. But I have not a housemaid's gifts nor a printer's.'

'More is the pity,' replied Hippolyta. 'However, since I can do these things, I do not mind facing the world. Moreover, I have the comfort of thinking that I eat no morsel which I have not earned.'

'Well,' said Karina, 'I never earned anything, and I never shall. But that does not signify. You would not condemn me to starve like Ugolino, would you, if the Revolution came?'

'No; I should keep you in a golden cage, as a beautiful curiosity of the past,' said Hippolyta, 'and you should subsist on the money taken at the doors.' They both laughed at this sudden fancy, which was as

novel to the speaker as to the person that figured in it. 'But what did you mean by saying it does not signify?'

'Oh, this,' said the other lady: 'I wanted to ask you whether there would be marrying and giving in marriage when your father had his way. You said not, at the beginning.'

'I said, or at least I had it in mind to say, that there should be no marriages of interest, or *convenance*, or without affection on both sides. There should be no slavery in marriage, no women shut up in a moral seraglio with the bolts and bars of the law keeping them in durance while their husbands were free. They should cease to be chattels. Where there was love there should be marriage; and when love ended marriage should end too. I would burn the body when the spirit was fled; the coffin you call marriage with the corpse of a dead affection.'

Lady May had become very thoughtful. She raised her eyes and looked steadily at Hippolyta till she had done speaking, and then said, with remarkable earnestness, 'Is not that the doctrine of Free Love?'

'If you like,' replied the young enthusiast, 'but I call it Free Marriage.'

'Where is the difference? I can see none,' said Lady May.

'That would be a long story. Love ought to be free, or it is worthless. But you understand by free love yielding to every impulse of the passions, and I

mean obeying the true woman's heart and despising tyrannical laws and usages. My father's motto has ever been, to distrust impulse and to despise custom. They are his very words.'

'But a woman has nothing to go upon except impulse and custom,' said Lady May. 'It is exactly how I should describe her life. Men, of course, have something else; they are strong, and can override custom and put down their impulses.'

'And why should a woman not do the same? She is strong in her affections, and she might be as strong in her reason if she were shown how. At any rate, when I learnt from my father that we women have a task and a duty in the world of to-morrow, I did not understand him to be encouraging caprice, or unbridled desires, or wandering fancies. I have seen many households in travelling over Europe with him; and when they were unhappy, the reason, as he pointed out, was that women are only half-women, not so just or truthful as men because their foreheads have been flattened and their minds kept childish. The balance will never hang equal between the sexes till their union is free and rational.'

'How come you to have thought so much at nineteen on a matter like this?' inquired Lady May.

'Because my father believes that knowledge is better than ignorance. He pointed out the books I was to read; and my mother, who understood him and was of a singularly apt mind, instructed me according to his wishes.'

'Then you do not approve of marriage, after all?' said the Countess. 'You think it is a wicked custom. I see that you do agree with the French romances, although you have not read much of Jean Jacques. How my uncle would open his eyes if he heard you!'

'I did not say all marriages were wicked,' answered Hippolyta; 'only that the true marriage is the union of heart with heart, of human beings who are free to give themselves and worthy of one another. Custom is nothing, pledging the hand is nothing; and passion, they say in the stories, will not last. In my father's creed marriage is the ideal of human life. It will be realised as it ought to be with other good things that are waiting.'

'But oh, my dear,' sighed the Countess, 'we cannot wait. We get old so soon—ten years sooner than the men, for they have the best of everything. Look at my Cousin Tom, for example. He is just about my own age; and if we were equal, as you said in your very pretty sketch—and I am sure I wish we were—but he looks ever so much younger than I do.'

Hippolyta was inwardly amused. The Countess's tender idyll was no secret to her; but whether she thought it should be realised in the golden age she would not say. A long pause followed. Glanville, his mind filled with conflicting thoughts, irritated, yet more in love than ever, was hardly conscious that he might be discovered at any moment, and that the consequences would be dreadful. During the conversation, which had absorbed all their attention, the

ladies had neglected to tend the fire, and it was dying down into dull white ashes, with a spark here and there glowing out of them. The sensitive Karina, usually wrapt in furs, began to shiver and look round for the explanation. 'Why, May,' she cried, 'the fire is gone out; we have forgotten to drink our tea, and it is quite dark and dismal. I am half-dead with cold. Do ring for lights.'

'We had better adjourn altogether,' replied her cousin, to which Rupert mentally added an amen. 'I don't know what has come over us to be sitting here like the witches in Macbeth. Now, my dear,' she continued, taking Hippolyta by the hand, 'since it is the first time you are dining here, you had better come to my room and put yourself in the hands of my maid. You would only get nervous if I were not there to see after you.'

Rupert strained his eyes through the curtains, and held his breath while the ladies were moving towards the door. They were very slow, for they had shawls and wrappers to collect in the semi-darkness; and it was not until the open door allowed a gleam of light to come in from the hall that they could see what they were doing. At last, at long last, they went. Glanville gave a sigh of relief; he waited a moment till the coast was clear, and then pulling the curtains aside, rose and stretched himself. He felt extremely tired and not a little excited. It was about time he said, that this strange conversation had ended, for he could not have endured either his cramped posi-

tion or the thought of eavesdropping much longer. And with these words he grasped the handle of the door. At the same moment he felt some one turning it from the outside.

Aghast, he staggered back, the door opened, and Hippolyta came running in. As the light fell full upon Rupert, standing like a lost man in front of her, she stopped and put her hands to her breast. A nervous woman would have screamed, a silly one would have fainted; but Hippolyta, possessed of the rare courage which answers at call, did neither. Her eyes met those of the artist, steadily, inquiringly. He was dead silent. 'You did not come in just now?' she said. He replied in a faint voice, 'No; it was —I don't remember how long ago.' She blenched, but kept looking at him still. 'And you heard what I have been saying?'—'I heard all,' was the low answer.

'Then,' she said, with the greatest agitation in voice and manner, 'oh, then, you despise me;' and as she spoke she turned from him. He caught her by the sleeve.

'Despise you!' he cried in a tone of the deepest love; 'Hippolyta, I adore you.'

She plucked her sleeve from him and was gone. He heard her step on the stairs, but he dared not follow. He was so overcome that he leaned against the wall to recover himself. Was he ashamed or exultant, struck with remorse or full of hope and courage? He was all these at once. For the

notions that Hippolyta had learned from her father he cared not a jot. Hers was a soul that turned them all to favour and to prettiness; she believed them because they seemed noble in her eyes and came with authority from the being she most revered. That she had laid bare her very innermost heart in speaking with Lady May and the Countess he was certain. She could never have been so frank with him, even though he stood in the place of a declared lover. He despise Hippolyta! Good heavens, why could he not this instant follow her and fall at her feet? But the die was cast. She had no choice now but to understand. He would speak that evening, if it were possible; to-morrow, at any rate. He had meant to wait a little for fear of alarming the bird ere it was caught in the snare; but events had proved too much for him. He must venture all, and, if necessary, venture again and again. While he stood absorbed in meditation the first dinner-bell sounded, and awoke him to the things of earth. He ran upstairs with a quicker step than usual, wishing that for the next four and twenty hours society and all that it inherit could be dissolved, leaving him and Hippolyta to be their own universe. At the bottom of his heart he doubted her love as little as he doubted his own. 'Free love, free marriage,' he repeated mechanically; 'yes, Hippolyta, it is love that makes us free.'

He hardly knew what he was doing, and made sad havoc among his dressing things during the next

half-hour. The fingers were hot and trembling with which he fumbled at his neckcloth; he took up this and that which were nothing to his purpose, looked about the room for what he held in his hand, had just sense enough not to attempt shaving—which, had he begun, this chronicle might speedily have been ended—and was not in any way ready when the second bell resounded in his ears. He came in as the rest were seated round the dinner-table, and took his place, which the fates had willed should be next to Hippolyta. He seemed distraught, but I regret to say that his distraction did not originate in a feeling of shame for what had happened. This honourable man, who for a long hour had listened behind a curtain to conversation which was not intended for any man's ears, could be scarcely said to remember where he had passed the afternoon. Some remnant of grace hindered him from directing his eyes towards Hippolyta. He knew very well, notwithstanding, both how she looked and what flowers she wore in her beautiful golden hair. He knew that she felt as uncomfortable and as happy as he did; that the slight quiver in her voice when she spoke—and she said but little—had infinite meanings; that her shyness equalled his, although it was better concealed; and when dinner was drawing to an end he absolutely looked up and met the tremulous smile on her lips with the shadow of an answering smile upon his own.

The Earl, unconsciously, was very good to them.

Knowing Hippolyta's unwillingness to say much in the presence of strangers, he had invited her on a day when the family were alone ; and as she appeared to be still in terror he acted like a considerate host, and spoke of things indifferent which required no answering, or narrated incidents out of his own past, and had the gratification of seeing the young lady's eyes bent on him while he discoursed. For no reward in the world would she have ventured to address Rupert except in monosyllables. Once, I say, she met his gaze, and her lips fashioned themselves unwillingly into a smile. But that over, she was glad to escape ; and when the gentlemen entered the drawing-room Glanville learned that Miss Valence had been too much fatigued to stay up, and was departed to her slumbers. His apology, his declaration of love or war, must wait until the moon came out of the clouds again.

But Hippolyta had not gone home ; that was his comfort. He should see her in the morning. She appeared at breakfast ; was tongue-tied as on the previous evening, and exceedingly careful not to address the young man, whose courage, dashed for a moment by her silence, revived when he looked upon her calm and beautiful face. She was agitated by no inward trouble, only absorbed and mastered. Could it be that she thought he would not speak ? He waited to hear of the arrangements for the day. Hippolyta, still pleading fatigue, asked that the expedition they had planned might be put off till

the afternoon, or till her next visit. Rupert was exultant. If she stayed in the house or in the Park he would find his opportunity. And so it came to pass. The other ladies went out riding. Miss Valence sat in the morning-room, where the lights were pleasant until mid-day, and a cheerful fire was burning. She had drawn her chair to the window, and was writing at a small desk, bending over which her figure was visible to any one that came that way along the terrace. Glanville walked about in the air, trying to collect his thoughts and cool the fever which ran in his veins; but, crisp as was the morning, and cold and clear in the stinted sunshine the aspect of the distant waters, he could not bring down his high-beating pulse. And when he had passed by the window where Hippolyta sat more times than he could reckon, he summoned up heart of grace, and walked boldly into the hall. In another moment he was by her side. Hippolyta, in her extreme agitation on seeing him there, stood up and had not a word to say. They both coloured violently.

'Miss Valence,' he began; he could get no further. She did not know how to rebuke or to encourage him, or which of the two she meant. He waited until she resumed her seat, then began once more. 'May I speak to you?' he said, in the lowest tones of a passion-stirred voice. 'I have an apology to make which ought not to be delayed. I have a mind to unburden of its load. It seems as though I were always doomed to offend you, and yet,—oh Hippolyta,'

he said, bursting out, 'you must, you do understand that since I saw you at the Hermitage I have had no other thought, day or night——'

'Than to offend me?' she asked, with her quick sense of the entanglement into which this eloquent lover had got himself. 'I am sure I ought to be very much obliged.' But the taunt would not serve. Rupert was in too serious a mood to be laughed out of his passion.

'Don't,' he cried; 'you are cruel. I hardly know what I am saying; but I do know, and I must try to make you know, what I mean. Hippolyta, if you can return the love I have felt ever since that day you will make me the happiest man alive. Can you, Hippolyta?'

Her face was burning. She grasped the edge of the writing-table to steady herself. Which way to turn she did not know, but it seemed to her that unless she made a resolute effort she should fall off the chair fainting. Rupert stood looking down on the ground, motionless and silent. The murmur of the waves came, like the sound of bells in the air, faint and musical, athwart the stillness; and neither of them spoke. Slowly, however, Hippolyta gathered up her strength as if for a supreme effort. She said to Rupert in a steady voice where no vibration betrayed her feeling, 'Mr. Glanville, let me ask you one thing.' He raised his eyes. She seemed perfectly mistress of herself as she went on, 'Do you mean that you respect or despise me?'

'Oh heavens,' he exclaimed, 'is it possible you can doubt? Hippolyta, I worship the ground you walk on. I never saw any one to compare with you.'

'And yet you listened yesterday afternoon to a conversation in which, if aught was said that as a matter of principle could shock you,—and I suppose many things shocked you,—I was the offender. I am well aware of the views men commonly take, what they expect of a woman, and what virtues they prize.'

'But I am not such a man,' returned Glanville with eagerness. 'Why do you not blame me rather for hearkening where I had no right, than yourself for uttering sentiments which you learned in infancy?'

'Blame you?' she answered, as if the notion had not occurred to her, 'because I did not think of it. I supposed you an honourable man. If you overheard me and made no sign, I daresay there was some explanation. Oh no, I did not blame you.'

'God bless you, Hippolyta,' he cried; 'you are the most admirable woman in the world. Was I to blame? I should have been perhaps, I confess, but for the feeling of intense and ardent love which made it impossible I should hear and not love you still more. It was that, and only that, which hindered me from at once coming forward when you began the story of your life.' And then, in few words, he told her how he had fallen asleep and what happened afterwards. She listened to him gravely, and as though

waiting for the conclusion he would draw from her yesterday's avowal. It was not long in coming.

'I am not given to philosophy or revolution myself,' were his words, 'nor can I pretend to feel enthusiasm about anything except art. But what does it matter? If you will stoop to love me, Hippolyta, I shall be happy. And if you will not? Oh, I cannot bear to think it. You see how impossible it is that I should live without you.'

He drew nearer as he spoke, and the great flame of his affection seemed to be rushing about her and hiding the whole world in its divine radiance. In her own mind she had surrendered already; what was there to oppose to Rupert's vehemence and sincerity? But still, she would have a clear understanding.

'You know how I have been brought up, you have heard what I think, and in spite of all that you profess to care for me?'

'Profess to care? Are you not the very breath of my existence? I am talking, perhaps, like a fool, like a boy. But, Hippolyta, lay upon me any task, put my sincerity to the test, do as you please with me now and henceforth, and you will see whether my love is honest and true.' His vehemence made him gasp for breath.

Hippolyta rose and put her hand in his. The maiden's eyes were glowing with soft light; the flush on her countenance was beautiful to see. 'Rupert,' she said. Then she too paused an instant. How he waited for the next word! 'Rupert, I believe in

you. Such as I am, since you—why should I not say it?—since you think of me in this way I will be yours.' He took her other hand in his with a convulsive grasp. But she drew herself away, and continued, 'Only you must not come between my father and me. I have promised to do his bidding in many ways that for the present I cannot explain. Free I am not. And, therefore, if you will not consent to wait until these things are over and done with, say the word. Let all this be as though it had never been. You could not guess what a strange and difficult course is mine.'

'Ah no,' said Glanville, 'it shall never be spoken, the word that would separate us. I am willing to wait. How long, Hippolyta? I can be patient if you love me.'

'It may not be long,' was her answer: 'a few months; at the outside a year or two. My father has lately shown more reserve in speaking to me than he was wont. But I know the time is running out, and that a crisis is approaching. Can you trust me to do you no injustice, to do myself none?'

'I trust you altogether, my darling,' he said; and there his great joy overcame him. The strong man broke down. Hippolyta was much affected. With a charming mixture of affection and timidity she laid her hand on his arm and said bashfully, 'Why do you cry? Are you displeased at anything I have said? No, I see you are not. I thought Englishmen never showed their feelings.' She

laughed very softly, with the tenderest playfulness in her accents. Rupert caught her in his arms and for a single moment held her there. But she slipped away from him, and, leaving her unfinished letter on the desk, fled out of the room.

Such was Rupert Glanville's engagement with Hippolyta Valence. When they met again in private, which by favour of the gods happened that very afternoon, it was decided that they should keep their promises secret until Hippolyta gave permission to make them known. This was not Rupert's proposal, or entirely his wish; for he felt, with reason, that he could not have a better defence against Lady May, nor put forward a more intelligible excuse for his change of conduct towards her, than to announce the engagement. But Hippolyta, to whom he did not speak of the Earl's daughter, was apprehensive that a premature disclosure of what had taken place would thwart her efforts to bring about a reconciliation between the families. She knew how great was Lady May's influence over Lord Trelingham; neither had she waited until now to discover that something in the nature of an enthusiastic friendship, perhaps of love, existed on her side which had not been returned by Rupert. She would be a rival, sooner or later, —unsuccessfully, no doubt, but a rival still,—for the hand of the artist. That need not signify once Hippolyta had brought the Earl and her father into some sort of agreement. But meanwhile, secrecy

appeared to her an absolute part of discretion. She was not afraid of losing Rupert, his love would protect him, and she had been too well used to deny herself pleasant things, and therefore knew how to be patient. The gentleman, in that submissive state which lasts till he reaches the altar, and ceases as if by magic when he is returning down the church after certain words have been spoken, yielded uncomplainingly. He was glad enough to have an assurance of possessing Hippolyta at whatever time and under such circumstances as she, in her wisdom, might determine. You never saw a mountain-pard so tamed by kindness, so subdued and willing to follow the hand that led him along, as this fiery, clear-eyed, tender-hearted Rupert. His best friends, always excepting Ivor Mardol, would not have known him as he stood humbly attendant on the behest of his newly-found mistress. Might he tell Ivor? he inquired. Hippolyta reflected for a while, and answered between a smile and a sigh that she did not doubt his friend, but it would be as well to let nobody hear of it besides her father. To him she was writing by the next post.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CELTIC KING ARTHUR

SO these two, opening the gates of Elysium, went down into its heathery dells and fresh green woodlands side by side. They had found one another amid the wastes of the world, and might ramble where it pleased them in a golden dream. They loved with the ardour of youth and the intensity of exceptional natures. Hippolyta's strange education had kept her innocent of the thousand artificialities which too often spoil the best of women, making them helpless, sentimental, or false, when they desire to be brave and true. She was the most loyal of human beings; her temperament was steeped in poetry, and the sweet impulses of the heart gave her slightest words a fascination. But where she loved she could not be sentimental; and Glanville, who had sometimes felt wearied with Lady May's —how shall I call it?—too great effusiveness, was delighted with a companion at once so charming

and so sensible. She told him much of her earlier life and her father's character and principles. To Rupert Colonel Valence seemed an enigma. He did not comprehend how a man who had professed such a hopeless creed as he had gathered from the Colonel's lips in the churchyard at their first and only meeting could spend his life in forwarding Utopian schemes. But Hippolyta, when this difficulty was urged, had much to say in explanation. 'My father,' she remarked, 'does take a sad view of existence. He thinks the forces of Nature are terrible and often malignant. To struggle against them, he says, would be as foolish as attempting to sweep the stars out of the sky. They are high above us, and we cannot reach them, though their influence shapes our destinies. But he will not allow that human misgovernment, or the ignorance of an oppressed multitude, or the distinctions of ranks and birth, are among the forces of Nature. When we come to that Utopia which you wise men of the world scorn' —she laughed and looked at Glanville, who was delighted to be so mocked—'we shall still be face to face with the terrible unknown powers that we can neither control nor appease. So my father says. But is that any reason, he asks, why we should tolerate kings and kaisers? Thus he combines the deep melancholy, which seems to grow upon him every year, with a burning zeal and such incessant activity as will not suffer him to stay at home. I feel it, but I would not hinder him from being noble.

My husband, when I have one, must be father and mother too. Will he, Rupert, think you?'

I need not chronicle Rupert's answer. He was willing that the Colonel should be always absent if they might be together. And they were, sometimes with no third to lessen their happiness, but oftenest in the company of their friends at Trelingham. One day, in particular, about a month after their engagement, Rupert, who spent many hours in the chalet working at his designs, begged Lady May and the rest of them to pay him a visit and see what he had done. The 'rest of them' included Hippolyta, who now often dined at Trelingham, and occupied the room which her kind host insisted on calling hers, and which was kept for her use whether she came or no.

It was a morning in March, but that mild climate turns March to April, and the promise of spring was in the air, filling it with dewy freshness. The party was larger than usual, and included not only the three ladies, but the Earl himself, Tom Davenant, and the learned Mr. Truscombe, clergyman of the parish, whose devotion to King Arthur had nearly sent Glanville home at the beginning of our story. The naval expedition which crossed the mere consisted of two comfortable skiffs and an outrigger for Tom Davenant; and luncheon was to be served in the chalet at the close of the exhibition. Glanville had expressly invited Mr. Truscombe. They were very good friends, and, though wide as the poles

asunder on all other subjects, had, as we know, various thoughts in common regarding their hero.

'I must confess,' said Mr. Truscombe, as they stood before the drawings, 'that I have never had patience with the ultra-sceptics who look upon King Arthur as a myth:

'"That gray king, whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain-peak,"

as one of their poets describes him. In my two volumes may be seen documents which prove not merely that he lived, but when he was born, how long he reigned over Britain, and the approximate dates of his twelve great battles with the heathen from over sea, together with fragments of the laws he enacted at Camelot, London, and York. As well, on the strength of poetical confusion in the Song of Roland, deny that Charles the Great existed as, on a like ground in the Morte d'Arthur and similar epic treatments of our subject, refuse to believe that Arthur was one of our most valiant monarchs.'

Glanville listened to the worthy man in respectful silence; and when he had concluded took up his parable.

'You and I, dear sir,' he said, 'are of one mind as to the essential point, which is that a medieval writer, like Sir Thomas Malory, could understand, and therefore could truly represent, no age but his own. The art of seeing through the eyes of a dead or distant generation was born, one may say, yesterday. It is only the modern artist or historian that can

picture King Arthur in his habit as he lived and the world which he dwelt in. Suppose him to be a real personage of the fifth or sixth century——'

'No need to suppose, my good sir,' interrupted Mr. Truscombe; 'I have proved abundantly that he cannot have been born later than——'

'Quite so,' said Glanville; 'I accept your data and do not discuss them. For me, as an artist, the question is how, if such a man existed, did he appear to the eye, what type of race did he belong to, of what species was his military apparel, his camp, his court? On such points, I contend, the writers upon chivalry are unsafe, or rather impossible, guides. They knew nothing of the ages that went before them. Fancy one of Arthur's knights being described as a near relation, cousin in some degree—I forget which—of Joseph of Arimathea!'

The company was disposed to laugh, but not so Mr. Truscombe. 'Ah, there,' he said, 'they may well have been in the right. For Joseph of Arimathea came to Glastonbury about twenty years, as I calculate, after the Ascension; and as he may have married in Britain——'

Glanville, who saw that he was on the very edge of an abyss into which next moment the erudite but fantastic Mr. Truscombe would drag him down, hastened to save himself by timely admissions.

'Yes,' he said, 'yes. I am sure you have made your calculations with admirable care, and I have not a word to say against Joseph of Arimathea or

Glastonbury. All I meant was that the elements, the necessary ingredients of a sixth century epic must be of quite a different cast from those which were taken after the Crusades to construct the legend—I would say the cycle—of Arthur.'

'And what do you suppose the true elements to be?' inquired Hippolyta, who was interested and forgot her timidity while she was speaking. But she knew her face was burning when she had got the words out of her mouth.

'Look at these drawings,' replied Glanville; 'I think you will perceive in them a glimmering of my idea. I do not pretend, however, to minute learning; and I am willing to go one mile even with Sir Thomas Malory, if I am not compelled to go twain. I agree, for instance, that historical reproduction is not the same thing as archæology. But there is a middle way between the realism we cannot hope to achieve and a caricature, if I may term it so, borrowed chiefly from what we see around us—from the stark, staring present—and given out as an image of the past. Nor, again, do I say that you may not, if you have genius like Mr. Tennyson, array these old-world stories in the garb of our century; but then they cease to be epic or historical, and become fables with a moral running through them. One kind of reality or inspiration they lose to assume another, and I have no quarrel with such a transformation.'

'But I have,' said Mr. Truscombe in his deep voice; 'it is tampering with holy things. The man

who moralises King Arthur into a fable will perhaps have as little respect for King David.'

'Anyhow,' Glanville went on, 'if the House of Trelingham is to be represented as descending from Uther Pendragon, it will never serve to paint on these walls the fancies of the late middle age. Now, I conceive that the older epic is the more truly poetical. It has less monotony; it does not give you ever-recurring adventures of a similar type, castles all built on one plan, enamelled meadows with a fountain in the middle of them, tournaments so much alike that to describe one is to know all, and a small company of actors which may be reduced to a knight, a damsel in distress, a villainous dwarf, and Merlin the Enchanter. I feel the exquisite pathos of certain incidents and the grandeur of certain quests. But none of these things need be discarded, and much may be gained for poetry, if we fill them with the rude, tumultuous warrior life, and light this up again with the gleam of a declining or a nascent civilisation such as did, in fact, shed a terror and a glory over the Arthurian period. But, really, I am making a speech. It will be pleasanter, perhaps, to see what I have endeavoured to design.'

'Yes, but you can go on talking,' said the Countess. 'I know a little of the older poetry, which I began to read during those terrible long nights in Russia when we sat as still as mice, not having a word to say or anything to amuse ourselves with except cards, which I hated. And I do like the ballads and those

strange old German stories, much better than the *Idylls of the King*. They are so wild, they make the blood freeze in your veins with horror and then hot with a kind of war-dance. You know the tales I mean,' she said, speaking to Lady May; 'the Nibelung stories and those gruesome ballads about swan's wings dropping blood.'

'Upon my word,' answered Lady May, 'you will give your friends a delightful idea of your character if these are the things that please you.'

'I understand Madame de Lutenieff,' said the artist, 'and I am glad to see that she understands me. The battle for Britain between Saxon and Cymri cannot have been child's play. It was "sword-play" rather, and "shield lightnings," to quote a metaphor of the latest singers. There ought to be the feeling of an everlasting struggle in pictures of the time. Again, there is the extraordinary combination of Roman customs inherited during their stay in Britain with the ancient habits and traditions which existed before their arrival and lasted when they were gone. The Romans, the Cymri, the Saxons—add to these the Celts who brought over sea other legends, other manners,—allied to those of their British cousins, yet not the same,—and arts, like that of working in fine gold and colours, which have never been indigenous within the four corners of this island. I daresay I am using terms rather loosely, and Mr. Truscombe will set me right. But such has been my notion,—the cycle of Arthur is of a more elemental period than

that in which it became famous, and the colours in which it is usually painted are not its own. The legends of Ossian and Cuchullain have more to say to it than Boiardo; it is partly Roman, but more than all it is Celtic, in its dim enchantments, its fury of hopeless battle, its almost feminine tenderness of friendship, its fainting passion, its religious ardours, all at length vanishing in defeat, and being found no more.'

Mr. Truscombe was somewhat too literal to follow the artist, and would now have been glad to ask whether he believed in a real King Arthur or held him to be a coinage of the brain. But, somehow, Glanville's eloquence daunted the antiquarian. He was fain, therefore, to take up the nearest of the drawings, which represented a pirate ship disembarking its mailed hordes, and to put a few searching questions on the subject of chain armour, regarding which he was the first authority in Europe. Glanville replied; and the others looked at his designs.

On so genial a day, when the sun was bright and warm, indoors and out seemed equally alluring. The party scattered,—some remaining in the study to discuss the drawings point by point, others lingering about the verandah, or going down to the boats and paddling round the chalet, which on every side presented a different but agreeable aspect. While they were thus occupied Rupert invited Hippolyta to ascend the watch-tower. She looked round for a companion, but every one was busy, and she ran gaily

up the stairs with him. The watch-tower was empty, and the great window gave a delightful view of the long gorge with its waving woods, the meandering silver thread which marked the course of the Yale, and the clear-shining waters with a circle of clouds above them which closed in the scene. Side by side Rupert and Hippolyta stood, without uttering a word, in that most intimate of companionships which would be lessened, not added to, by speaking. Their cup was full, was brimming over. Happiness had come to them and seemed willing to stay. The breeze which fanned their cheeks, the light which rested lovingly upon their heads and appeared to caress them, was intoxication enough. They could have remained silent thus and lost in a delicious sense of their nearness to one another had not some movement on the waters below them broken the spell. It was only Tom Davenant mooring his outrigger at the steps. Glanville smiled, and, as if remembering the purpose that had brought him, went to a chest of drawers in the room, and taking thence a square sheet of paper, as it would seem, returned to Hippolyta and held it before her. The young lady looked, drew back a little to see the object more clearly, and took it in her hand with an exclamation of delight. 'Oh Rupert,' she cried, 'when did you paint this?'

He laughed mischievously. 'If you speak so loud what will become of your precious secret, Hippolyta?'

'True,' she said in a lower tone; 'but I am so astonished. How could you recollect me in my

riding-habit, and paint it all from memory. For you never saw me in this attitude but once.'

'How could I recollect? Ask rather how I could forget. I saw you day and night as you stood in the room downstairs, your head turned expectantly towards the door and a book in your hand. You pretended to be afraid, but your eyes did not look it. Oh, it was easy enough to paint, I can assure you, Hippolyta.'

'Hush, you mustn't say Hippolyta,' she whispered, 'and keep your distance, sir. Yes, it is beautifully done. But where are my riding-gloves? I don't look complete without them.'

'They were lying on a chair when I came in and disturbed you. Then you took them up, intending to go. But you left one of them behind, all the same.'

'Did I, indeed?' she said, with great calmness. 'And I suppose you found it. You must restore it, please.' She was laughing to herself slightly.

'I wish I had found it,' said Glanville pettishly, 'but it fell to the lot of Ivor Mardol to do that; and the wretch threw it into the mere.'

Hippolyta became interested. 'How do you know he found it?' she asked.

'Because he showed it me. I held it for two or three minutes. Then he took it away again, and said it ought to be destroyed.'

'Did he say anything else?'

'I don't think he said, but he implied that a message had come with the glove.'

When Hippolyta heard these words she became very quiet. She was thinking whether to leave matters as they stood, or explain them to Rupert. When she had made up her mind she said, with her eyes fixed on her own portrait, 'And you told him who had brought the message?'

'I told him nothing,' answered Rupert. 'I had not your permission. Moreover, it was no concern of mine. There are subjects on which Ivor and I have agreed that confidence between us would be impossible, and we are the best of friends notwithstanding.'

'Well,' she said, 'that is right, and only what I should expect from both of you. I do not know Mr. Mardol except by your report, though of course I knew his name when I came here that morning. I have never seen him. But I may, without breach of orders, tell you what concerns myself. I remember saying that my visit was due to curiosity—and, in fact, it was. I had a message to give your friend of great, though to me unknown, import. Nor could I entrust it to another, or present myself at Trelingham. In this difficulty I forget who told me that Mr. Mardol had taken up his abode in the chalet, which I had often seen from the heights over there, but had never entered. The thought occurred to me that I had better make an attempt to see him here. I was curious about the place, for, as perhaps I told you, my father used to be its regular tenant when he was a young man. Whether I saw Mr.

Mardol was of no consequence. I could make pretty sure that he would receive my message once I was able to get into his study. I came to the water's edge, examined the state of the rooms by means of a pocket telescope I carried with me, and arrived at the conclusion that there was no one at home. I determined to hazard it, and rowed across, being afraid only that somebody might come from the other side and catch me before I disembarked. However, nothing of the sort happened. I ventured in, left my message in such a way that it could not be overlooked, and went, somewhat timidly I confess, into the remaining rooms, like Bluebeard's wife when her husband was gone out. I little expected that Bluebeard would return from my side of the water; and I was more alarmed than you think when I saw you. Did you notice any gesture I made as you opened the door?'

'No,' said Glanville; 'I was too much taken aback to notice anything, except that you were the most lovely woman I had ever set eyes on.'

'Quiet, quiet,' she answered. 'No, I soon perceived you could not be the person of whom I was in quest, or you would have given me the countersign. Dear me,' she went on meditatively, 'when my father joined the movement if any one had talked to a stranger,—and you are a stranger, you know——.' He held up his hand, as if to threaten her, but she motioned him to keep still, and continued, 'Talked, I say, of signs and countersigns, he would have been

judged a traitor and punished as he deserved. But now we are coming more and more into the open; there will soon be little secrecy left.'

They heard Tom Davenant calling Rupert. 'The Earl wants you,' he said, as they came downstairs. 'I think there is some plan afoot about your drawings and my birthday, though the two things haven't much connection, one would think. It is all the Countess's doing. I wish she would let it alone. She is too clever by half.'

On entering the studio they found the party collected round Rupert's drawings, and Madame de Lutenieff in earnest conversation with her cousin. She at once came to the artist, and with enthusiasm in her accents said to him, 'Oh, Mr. Glanville, I do so hope you will take my side. I am sure as a painter you ought.'

'I shall have the greatest pleasure in doing so,' he answered gallantly, 'as soon as I know what the discussion is about. But Mr. Davenant has left that for you to tell.'

'Mr. Davenant never comes to my help in anything,' she said, with a reproachful look at that young man, who instead of attending to her was considering the signs of the times, so far as they could be studied from the window in front of him.

'I don't see the good of a dress ball,' said Tom, without looking round. 'Why cannot people dance in their ordinary clothes and not make themselves into a museum of curiosities? Fancy me got up like

your Launcelots and your Percivals, or whatever you call them! They look absurd enough on a stage, but in a ballroom where you know who the fellows are they look twenty times more ridiculous.'

'But then,' said Lady May, 'you profess to hate dancing altogether and you don't want to keep your birthday, so you are out of court. This is the case,' she continued, addressing Glanville: 'my Cousin Karina was struck with the *ensemble*, to use her own term, of your designs, and thought they would fall into admirable groups if we could get people to dress up to them. She is very fond of dancing,—are you not, Karina?' The Countess made a gesture of delight, but would not interrupt Lady May, who went on to explain that among the festivities to celebrate Mr. Davenant's majority—she looked at Tom as she spoke—a dress ball would do much to enhance the general pleasure, and there was the Great Hall, with its frescoes begun, inviting them to illustrate the floor from the walls, so to speak, and to make a grand *tableau vivant* of the Arthurian legends. It would be an original and quaint device, but without Glanville's aid in designing dresses and sketching the groups it could not be carried out. How did it strike him?

Instead of answering like a sensible young man, Rupert turned demurely to Miss Valence and inquired what she thought. She laughed, and blushed, but would not reply beyond saying that in these matters she had no opinion to give.

'But Mr. Glanville is quite right,' said the Countess; 'you ought to have an opinion, my dear. For you would of course shine in our galaxy that evening.'

'I shine in a galaxy?' said Hippolyta, laughing; 'you forget, Countess, that I have never been introduced to society, and should most likely not be admitted if I wished for such a thing.'

'Oh, nonsense,' replied Karina; 'you have the most old-fashioned ideas. In the first place, there is no such thing as society, in that exclusive sense of the word, now; and in the second, it would not matter if there were. Make your *début* at Trelingham, my dear, and rely upon it you will find no doors locked afterwards.'

Hippolyta smiled. 'Now that your door is unlocked to me,' she said, addressing Lord Trelingham, 'I do not think I mind whether the rest are shut or open.'

'My dear young lady,' said he, taking her hand, 'you will be most welcome if you come to this house, either on the occasion my niece has mentioned, or any other. Colonel Valence may have renounced society, but that should be no injury to his daughter, and only those would raise a question who do not know you.'

'Well, and of course you will come,' said Karina; 'that is all settled. I will be your chaperon and—but have you learned dancing?' she asked with comic anxiety.

Hippolyta answered, 'I am more of a Spanish than an English girl, remember. Did you ever hear of one who could not dance, or was not fond of dancing? It is the most exquisite enjoyment I know. But, indeed, I have not danced in such fine company as this would be.'

'Never mind,' said the Countess; 'you will probably put us all to shame. However, is it decided, and does Mr. Glanville promise his services?'

'Mr. Glanville will promise anything,' replied the infatuated artist. He had never till then thought of dancing with Hippolyta. What a heaven of happiness was in store! How admirable of the Countess to propose it and of Tom Davenant to come of age just at that time! To get any further conversation of a sensible kind from Rupert was for the rest of the day impossible. The Countess made her observations; Lady May, whose suspicions had been lulled to sleep, was not blind, and began once more to feel the gnawing pangs of jealousy; while Mr. Davenant wondered that people should care so much about tiring themselves to death in a hot and crowded assembly, and would have given all the balls between now and next year for a good day's fishing.

But the dress ball was decided on, and there were to be tableaux representing King Arthur and his Table Round.

CHAPTER XIX

TABLEAUX VIVANTS

IN proposing, out of her own head, a dress ball at which Miss Valence should be present, the Countess Lutenieff was carrying out one of those schemes, so dear to the impish character she affected, through which accidents of a perverse kind are wont to happen. She was not very learned or large-minded; and, like most ignorant persons of a quick-witted turn, she was subtle, preferring always the crooked path to the straight, and delighted when she could imagine that she made the puppets dance to her playing. Since she had recovered from the shock of her husband's death—it had taken her about six months, for she was of an affectionate disposition—her one aim had been to marry Tom Davenant, whom from a child she had worshipped. This alone reconciled her to the English sky with its everlasting gray tones, and the English manners at once so self-satisfied and so chilling. But Mr. Davenant was a

shy bird, and would not stoop at her call. Nor had she a falconer's voice to lure him back again from his pursuit of more interesting prey. He, like the rest of the Davenants, was guided by a fine sense of honour,—too fine thought the Russian lady, since it appeared to be driving him on a marriage with his cousin. And its recompense might possibly be the hand of Lady May in spite of the six years which divided their ages. Nothing, said Karina to herself, will make me secure on that side but a violent passion on the part of Lady May for some one who is not Tom Davenant. Might not Glanville be the man? She had hoped and prayed so while the painting went on in the picture-gallery; but that was now at an end. The artist seemed to be dominated by a fresh sentiment in which Lady May had no part, and as Tom's birthday drew near, bringing with it apprehensions of calamity, the Countess sat down to consider what could be done. If Glanville was not desperately in love elsewhere he would fall a sure victim to her cousin, provided that May Davenant cared to subdue him. And how make her care? A great passion, Karina had read in her French authors, is only a slight one thwarted by a great difficulty. Add jealousy to liking and the thing might be done. Whatever else was uncertain, it could not be doubted that May cared for Glanville more than she did for Tom Davenant. If she married her cousin, it would be from devotion to the name and ancient descent she had been taught to revere. Let her be infatuated

about the artist, and her refusal of the cousinly hand would follow as a matter of course. Miss Valence had entered from the side-scene, therefore, just when she was wanted, and her cue, in the language of the drama, was 'green-eyed jealousy.' To promote that feeling in the breast of Lady May was now her cousin's dearest wish, her hourly and daily thought. The dress ball seemed to her an inspiration of some good genius. There would be much preparation, and at Trelingham a great deal of rehearsing—so to call it—with these original costumes, which would need to be carefully designed. And when the intimacy of the preparations had stung Lady May like a gadfly, the ball itself was to do the rest. She would see Rupert with Hippolyta. She would be mad with disappointment and jealousy, above all if her attention were directed that way; and when her feeling had reached that height—good-bye to Cousin Tom, concluded the Countess; he will speak only to be repulsed. Thus she thought, much musing; and the unconscious puppets fell into their places, and waited till she should pull the wires to begin their exhibition.

One point remained doubtful. Was there really anything between Hippolyta and the artist, and if so, how far had the attraction gone? To ascertain this was of the last importance. Too little would be as fatal as too much. Miss Valence went about in the most beautiful innocence, quiet and composed, like one that had not a care in the world. When at Trelingham her bearing towards Rupert was cordial

and friendly, but disarmed suspicion; and though the artist was often in the neighbourhood of Falside he never passed its threshold. The truth was that with Glanville's roaming habits and Hippolyta's constant ridings unattended at what hour and in which direction she pleased, these young lovers could afford to be on their good behaviour at the Court. They met under every variety of circumstance, and the romance of concealment added not a little to their passion. It was not, however, a very wicked way in them. Colonel Valence had taught his child that she must search into her heart, follow where it loved, and not fear the consequences. Though no reply had come to her letter, she knew he would consent. He must have got beyond the reach of correspondence, she fancied; that was all.

Not long after the ball had been determined on Miss Valence was surprised one afternoon to see the Countess Lutenieff ride up to Falside, enter the library, and ask her dear Hippolyta for a cup of tea. She was all smiles and graciousness, hoping she had not interrupted the interesting work in which Miss Valence was sure to be engaged; but the lovely air and the absence of Lady May, who was visiting some distant friends for some few days, had tempted her to ride over the moor for a *tête-à-tête*, which she knew would be delightful. Hippolyta put away her books and papers, made her visitor welcome, and submitted to her fate. She was quick enough to perceive that Karina had laid her plan for an afternoon's talk, but

on what subject or to what end, in so flighty a creature, it was impossible to conjecture. They sat by the open window, which was a bower of exquisite creepers, and looked down the valley over green meadows and cornfields where the blade was springing. Hippolyta waited and wondered. But the purpose which had brought Karina still lay hidden, sharp and cruel as it was, like the sword of Harmodius wreathed in myrtle. She touched many flowers of talk with her light wings, flitted up and down from art to social systems, from women to their dressmakers and the last new thing in female frippery, coming nearer and nearer to the point she had in view, sweeping round it in circles that ever grew narrower. She could be wily and indirect when she chose, although much of her ordinary conversation had the malicious naïveté of a precocious child's. And thus, without quite knowing how they came to it, Hippolyta found herself discussing Lady May's opinions on the subject of marriage and her probable destiny. Nothing could be less reserved or affected than the Countess while speaking of her cousin. 'And oh, my dear,' she said, 'I thought how providential it was, the other day, that you gave us your own romantic views—delightful I call them—when May was by to hear you. It will, it must, I am sure, have done her good.'

'In what way?' inquired Hippolyta, languidly. She did not want these sentimental confidences, especially with the Countess.

'Ah, you know, a word in season does so much

good. You were warning my cousin against a temptation which, with her present ways of looking at things, might well prove too much for her.'

'Indeed!' said Hippolyta. She would not encourage the Countess.

'Yes, indeed,' answered the other eagerly; 'no less than to make a real *marriage de convenance* where affection would have no share, to sacrifice a consuming passion to interest, or at any rate to opinion. You spoke so beautifully of obeying the impulse of the feelings. I am sure she agreed with you. Do you remember how little she seemed surprised by what were certainly bold views?'

'Yes,' said Hippolyta, feeling uncomfortable, though she could not say why. What was all this about? Had she any interest in it? She must know more. 'A consuming passion,' she said after a pause. 'That is very strong language. And have you been told who is the object of Lady May's devotion, or is it a secret?'

'I have not been told,' replied Karina; 'but to me it is no secret. What should you say to Mr. Glanville?'

Hippolyta's heart gave a great leap. The sword was out and had gone through her. 'Mr. Glanville?' she echoed under her breath. It was impossible to go on. The Countess waited, like some savage beast that sees its victim fascinated at its own first spring from the thicket. But Hippolyta did not mean to let her secret escape. She took in her hand the

cup of tea which she had laid down, and went on with an effort, 'Mr. Glanville,—I have nothing to say to Mr. Glanville. Do you mean that Lady May would accept an artist? Would it not be marrying beneath her?'

'I did not talk of marrying; I talked of a consuming passion. That is just the point. My cousin, if she held your principles, would insist on marrying Mr. Glanville, for she has been in love with him ever since he came to Trelingham, and he with her. But she is tempted to marry Mr. Davenant, who stands next in the succession to her father's title and estates.'

This was overwhelming. The sword now was rifling her heart, turning in the wound it had made. Hippolyta was no woman of the world, and her poor brave defence was nearly at an end. Rupert in love with Lady May! The room reeled about her; she could not speak; she was incapable of thinking. Karina sat still, conscience-stricken at the apparent success of her stratagem, but yet enjoying its success. She had in her that mixture of cruelty and remorse which plays so strange a part in the Russian temperament. She was disgusted with herself; but nothing in heaven or earth would have stayed her hand now. In this contest Hippolyta was not her match. A pause of some moments ensued, at the end of which Miss Valence in a low unsteady voice, which could scarcely be heard across the table, murmured, 'In love with one another! It is impossible. I do not believe it.'

'No; I daresay you are as much surprised as I was when it first dawned upon me. Not that Mr. Glanville is unworthy of my cousin's hand; far from it, he would do honour to any woman.' This was cunningly said, as a compliment, forcible though indirect, to Hippolyta's own discernment. 'But,' the Countess went on, 'if you had seen them, as I did, for weeks together, morning after morning in the picture-gallery, Lady May talking and Mr. Glanville looking at her, you would have no doubt on the subject.' Karina forgot, apparently, how often she had left them alone and departed on her own errands.

'Of course he looked at her,' said Hippolyta with a melancholy smile; 'how else could he have painted her portrait?'

'Oh, but there is looking and looking. Moreover, they engaged in the most confidential talk, quite like old friends. You know how charming Mr. Glanville's conversation can be when he is in the vein.'

Ah, yes, she did know, too well for her peace. It was a dangerous gift that sudden vehement inspiration which made his tongue so eloquent, his imagination so vivid and original, after a long interval of silence or depression. She had observed that when Rupert was in the mood any listener would suffice; all he seemed to need was an audience. The explanation which he gave her one day was plausible, but did not take away the peril. He said that when a man has lived by himself as much as he had done in former years, the necessity for speech becomes from

time to time imperious, and it matters not whose is the open ear into which it is poured. He had a whole chapter of curious illustrations to the point, adding merely that he still found himself holding forth to an audience of one without minding whether his silent *vis-à-vis* were taking in every word he said or falling asleep open-mouthed under its influence. But she was convinced that when he chose to speak his audience would not slumber. Lady May had been charmed; yes, why should she not? Before Karina spoke that idea had crossed her mind. But had Rupert been charmed in turn? How was she to find out? what was she to think? Could she ask this chattering, frivolous, mocking lady, who cared little what game her shafts brought down?

But there was no need to ask. Karina went on with her story, founded on fact as we know, but embellished and exaggerated until it seemed that Rupert might have been kneeling at Lady May's feet, in the guise of a troubadour, imploring her to have pity on a desponding lover. Hippolyta could say little in reply, nor dared to utter that little. If she spoke, she was betrayed. Her utmost effort only succeeded in casting a doubt on Karina's powers of observation. But the Countess was not to be shaken. 'Rely upon it, my dear Hippolyta,' she said, 'Lady May is devotedly attached to Mr. Glanville, and he was not unwilling to accept the incense she offered. Three months ago I should have said he was in love with her; and I still think it, although

naturally the opportunities for its display are neither so frequent nor so favourable as they were. You, of course, may have surer grounds to go upon.'

'What do you mean?' said Hippolyta, resolved to withstand this prying. 'You do not suppose Lady May would give me a confidence which she seems not to have bestowed on you.' She spoke hotly and angrily.

'Now, my dear,' answered the Countess, 'you will frighten me if you look like that. I mean no harm. But you are such a friend of Mr. Glanville's, since the day you gave him shelter, that I fancied he might have spoken to you of his longings, aspirations, and so forth.'

'He has never said a word to me about Lady May,' answered Hippolyta, still angry and miserable. 'Why should he come to me about her?'

'Why, indeed? But men like to take advice sometimes from a woman they can trust. However, all this is wide of the mark. It is curious how one topic leads to a hundred. For, you see, we began by saying what an excellent thing it would be if your principles could become those of Lady May. She ought to marry Mr. Glanville——'

'She ought to do nothing of the kind,' said Hippolyta, irritated into expressing more than was prudent. 'Let her marry her cousin, according to the custom of her class, and her own convictions of duty.'

'What?' said the Countess, delighted to see the

flame spreading and glowing so warm; 'surely you are inconsistent, Miss Valence. Would you not have her marry the man she loves?'

'Not if he does not love her.'

'But he does, I can assure you. Mr. Glanville has peculiar ways, like all his tribe. Nevertheless, observe them during the next few weeks when they are together, and you will be as convinced of it as I am. Dear, dear,' she said, rising at the last words, 'how quickly the afternoon passes with a friend, especially one whose conversation is so engrossing! And the days are still short. Good-bye, my dear. Pray don't stir; I see you have much to do, if those piles of correspondence on the table are yours. May comes back the day after to-morrow, and you will be wanted, you know, to choose your Arthurian costume. *Good*-bye!'

She went off with a light step and a smile of triumph. Miss Valence would do her part. There was affection or ambition on her side, sufficient to make her an excellent rival—a Fair Rosamund to Lady May's Eleanor. The scheme promised admirably, and she sang little snatches of Russian or French ballads as she cantered along. Whether Hippolyta had been deeply wounded and might bleed to death she did not consider, nor did she care. She was fond of Miss Valence, in that selfish way which people have who like to see beautiful things about them; fond as she might have been of a lovely flower, or an Arab steed. But she had only one

strong human feeling, and that was for no woman. She did mean to marry her cousin; and she would have immolated a thousand Hippolytas in one holocaust rather than give him up.

I will not say that she had roused the demon of jealousy in a heart so innocent, so little accustomed to seek itself or to indulge in malice and evil thoughts, as that of Hippolyta. So great a revolution was not to be accomplished in a day. But she had awakened her victim from a dream of childlike happiness, and, suddenly striking into the chords of her enchanted harp, had turned the music to harsh discords which went on sounding and jangling and would not be still. Colonel Valence had left his daughter without the usual safeguards of conventional religious training, and she had moved among the strange men and women that made her world, free as the weakest or the strongest of them, familiar with much more than the name of sin and moral degradation. For she had witnessed something of the misery upon which her father's damning argument against the society of to-day was founded. But, truly, as she declared to Lady May, her days had been spent without harm. She harboured no unbecoming thoughts; she was fearless and free; nor, until Rupert fixed his eyes upon her, had she known what it was to care for any man save her father. The power of first love is proverbially intense; and when it comes at once, without warning, to a heart so large as Hippolyta's, and hitherto so self-contained,

it has a depth of sacred purity, of kindling fire. Had *she* spoken of a consuming passion she would have been better justified than the Countess, who employed such words because they sounded romantic and startling, not for any well-assured knowledge that they were true of Lady May. The Spanish temperament, the unfettered life, the enthusiasm for things demanding sacrifice, the glamour of a devotion, sincere and expressive, on Rupert's side, must all be remembered, if we would calculate what elements there were for jealousy, watchfulness, and a perplexed yet irresistible love in Hippolyta. She did not doubt the man who had breathed out his soul in passionate utterances before her. Perish the thought, she cried, when it rose from the deeps of her anguish like a phantom and threatened to eclipse the light of heaven. She knew that he was loyal; but was there full security from the past, or had he so entangled himself in its consequences that he might not hope to be free? Most men had such a past; her books told her so, and she could bear to think of it with an equal mind, if the curtain which had fallen over it for Rupert was never to be raised again. But how, if Lady May interposed, if a claim there really was, or an old love with which to be off ere he could be on with the new? Hippolyta was devoted, but she was likewise proud and generous. She would not be Lady May's rival should it appear that Rupert, in whatever fashion, had given her a promise, or that his affection was divided. As she came to this resolution her heart

sickened within her. She sat motionless, where the Countess had left her by the window, gazing with fixed and meditative eyes over the valley till the moon rose up in the cloudy sky, her hands clasped on her knees, while she thought and thought, and the slow tears began to well up from within and form on the tender eyelashes. She did not know where to look for help. A Christian maiden, she said half-unconsciously, would have prayed for guidance,—whatever prayer was. But she could only resolve to be true and trusting, impartial to Lady May as to Rupert, and not unjust. It was a heavy burden for young shoulders, and the tears that fell at last were exceedingly bitter.

Her resolution, all this notwithstanding, held firm. She must ascertain the state of the case, and by that be guided. Until this afternoon she had given no assurance of attending the dress ball, which was a kind of entertainment alien from her feelings and characteristic of that social or aristocratic existence with which she could have so little in common. Rupert's pleadings even had not overcome her dislike to it; and the Countess, for all her zeal in the good cause, was obliged to be content with a very conditional acceptance. Now, however, she would take the *rôle* offered her and appear among the rest. Their frequent meetings, if she studied them with her eyes open, must surely betray the relation in which Rupert stood to Lord Trelingham's daughter. And if when the birthnight festivities were come her mind was not

clear, she would ask Glanville the question, cost what struggling and shame it might. False, no, he was not false. It was easy for a man to be imprudent, but impossible that Rupert did not mean every word he had whispered in her ear. Great as was her trouble, so new and unexpected that it quite overcame her for days together, it left in the depths of her being an assured trust that love had answered love between them twain.

As soon as she dared, that is to say when her self-control was somewhat restored, she went over to Trelingham. Lady May had come back, bringing with her Mrs. Davenant, the well-known fashionable personage who called Tom her son, and expected from him a son's devotion, though she could not give up the world so far as to make Foxholme the pleasant place it should have proved to that amiable young man. She and Lord Trelingham, though of course very old acquaintance, had never got beyond the first stage of intimacy, while Lady May, to whom the frivolities of fashion were odious, was merely civil to her and did not see her more than twice in a season. She had come now to preside over the arrangements for keeping Tom's birthday and issue the much-coveted invitations which were to gather a numerous party at Trelingham. She, also, was asking herself whether her son had serious thoughts of marrying his cousin; and it was part of her endeavouring just now to find out the way he had spent these months in the country, with Lady May on the

one side and Madame de Lutenieff on the other. For though Tom was an affectionate son he wrote seldom, and there was that in Mrs. Davenant's character which forbade him to let her see into his heart. There could be no real confidence between persons so unlike, however attached they might be to one another. Tom felt more comfortable at Trelingham than he had ever been under his own roof. He loved his guardian, the Earl, with a simple but earnest devotion, which had increased as the boy grew to man's estate; and he looked forward to being perfectly happy with him and Lady May, if the latter would consent to be his wife. He knew she was infinitely beyond him in cleverness and knowledge of the world; but, if anything, he was attracted rather than repelled by that circumstance. A stupid man, he argued, ought to have a clever wife who would keep him from blundering. He did not think himself unequal to the duties of a country gentleman; but, should he become Earl of Trelingham, there would be Parliament and the burden of society, and who could help him so well as Lady May?

That he would succeed his cousin if he outlived him was as certain as anything in this world. Lord Trelingham had assured him of it in so many words. It was a piece of eccentric generosity, perhaps of unnecessary frankness. But he had acted towards Tom Davenant during the last five or six years as he would have acted towards his own son; and it was in keeping with the rest of his conduct to give up Trelingham

Court to the festivities which must otherwise have taken place at Foxholme.

The house party would be numerous, and was already gathering when Hippolyta called after her sad visit from the Countess. She went through her introduction to Mrs. Davenant without flinching, but was glad to escape into the Great Hall, where a kind of rehearsal for the tableaux was in course of arrangement. Rupert, who had not been able to go near Falside for several days, came to her as soon as she had exchanged a word with Lady May, and was so struck on observing her paleness and the dark rings round her eyes that he could think of nothing else. He drew her away, under pretence of showing her the dresses from which she was to choose, and in low passionate undertones implored her to tell him what was the matter. She could not mistake the feeling in his voice; it was that of the most devoted love. Her spirits revived; and, though she put him off with unmeaning answers, there was enough to cheer him in her assurance that she should soon be well. He looked at her with tender anxiety; he saw that something must have happened. But she had secrets which it did not become him to pry into; her troubles might be connected with Colonel Valence's numerous projects, and were not to be removed even by a lover's assiduity. However, he would not quit her side till she insisted on it; and his frequent glances towards her revealed a preoccupation which the Countess was delighted to behold, and which, in her careless infantine

way, she pointed out to her cousin. Lady May was in her most difficult mood, irritated by the presence of Mrs. Davenant at Trelingham, dissatisfied with Rupert, and not at peace in her own mind. She had not conceived any great affection for Hippolyta; but now, under the Countess's malicious guidance, she saw, or thought she saw, enough to justify dislike and suspicion. Was Glanville bestowing elsewhere the love she had striven so desperately to win? It made her wretched when Miss Valence came near him, when he spoke to her in seeming confidence, when he showed how she must wear the elfin array in which he proposed to deck the Queen of Fairyland, as he smilingly called her. She was to be the Lady of the Lake.

All this reacted, according to Karina's deep-laid plan, on the feelings of Hippolyta. She, too, was made wretched; for Lady May, resolved on having her will, found means to engage Rupert's attention, and gave him so many commissions, had such a variety of questions to ask and possibilities to provide for, that the lovers, after their first greeting, met again only for an instant that afternoon. Time was when, if any one had charged May Davenant with being an adept in the arts of jealousy, she would have turned a scornful eye upon the speaker and bade him begone with a proud consciousness of her innocence. Nor am I saying now that she was mean or malevolent; she was passionate and had forgotten herself, that was all. But was it not a sad falling away on the part of

that lofty spirit? Hippolyta, struck through with Karina's fiery shaft, suffered and was helpless. She had no arts to counteract the imperious charm of the Earl's daughter; and when she beheld Rupert's embarrassment, how he resisted in vain, nor would look steadily in the face of Lady May, she began to fear that an entanglement really existed, and went home more miserable than she came. Certainly, she might have demanded an explanation from Rupert, and one word would have sufficed to scatter the clouds in her heaven. But it was not the time; she dreaded an explosion which must have blasted all her hopes, or sent him from Trelingham at this unseasonable moment. The play was to be played out. She took her part bravely; but as the days went on she became more and more resolute in the thoughts which had begun to ferment within her.

That afternoon was a sample of those which followed. Rupert, engaged from morning till night, and often in Lady May's company, had less time than usual to spend with Hippolyta, and none to mark that her dejection was profound and her paleness increasing. To mark, I say; for he felt that there was a vague misunderstanding between them, which he meant, as soon as the festival would let him, to have thoroughly cleared up. Lady May, however, was his greatest trial. The intimacy that had so happily fallen through seemed reviving again, and with it a sense of the magnetic danger, so to speak, which had compassed him round about in the picture-gallery.

When Hippolyta was present he felt it less; but then another peril awaited him, for he did not choose that his old sin should be ever staring him in the face, and yet it did. Certain confidential allusions, slight yet speaking glances which might signify nothing in Lady May, but were embarrassing to him, and a demeanour in which friendliness might have the greater share, yet love not be wholly wanting,—he could no more define these things to himself than he could photograph the wind, but he knew that it was not imagination which led him to fear them as the harbingers of catastrophe. What if Hippolyta should notice them too? He anathematised the folly of six months ago, his weakness when he ought to have been proof against this contagious sentiment. He would certainly at the very earliest quit Trelingham under one pretext or another, and put a solid interval of time between the painting of the Madonna with its mischievous associations and the work he had yet to do. There must be an end of this phantasmal coquetry, this mock sun of love which shone over against the true, and perplexed observers. He little knew the forces against which he was contending.

And so, amid fears and hopes and the strong resolutions of those upon whom fortune had laid the burden of a deadly struggle, Tom Davenant's birthday came. The house was full of guests; the Chase was thrown open, and the solemn early dinner appointed at which the Earl's tenantry were to hear their future lord deliver his maiden speech. The bright spring weather,

dashed with a shower of rain, was all that could be wished; and if I do not dwell upon the events of the day, it is not because they deserved no sacred poet, but that one who knew how to adorn his grateful task with flowers of rhetoric to which I may not pretend, has already written of them in the *County Chronicle*, to the files of which I refer inquiring friends. For I must hasten to the evening, when a more select, but hardly less numerous, company was assembled in the Great Hall, and the *tableaux vivants* were beginning.

Hippolyta, who had accepted Madame de Lutenieff as her chaperon in default of another, descended from her room with beating heart, and was glad to find herself only just in time for her share in the representations. The Countess led her at once to the sort of green-room where the members of the first group were putting themselves in order. A stage had been erected at the end of the Great Hall, opposite the chief entrance. In front of it hung the ample folds of a curtain which was to draw up to the sound of music, when the tableau was arranged and the signal given. The scenes were to be presented at intervals, and to last only so long as might be required to take in their meaning and to distinguish the characters which made them up, for anything like a sensible interruption of the dancing was not proposed, and would have been received with scant favour. Rupert had advised that the grouping should follow the order of his frescoes, including some which

were only among his drawings, but not as yet visible on the walls. Thus it began with the Finding of Arthur, when, in the great temple, he draws out of the stone the miraculous sword which has resisted the efforts of all pretenders to the crown of Britain. Tom Davenant, with his exquisite beauty of face and manly form, was the very model of a young hero, and not unnaturally had been compelled, against his will, to put on the trappings of Arthur. A crowd of knights occupied the foreground, behind them rose the dim pillars and vast recesses of a rude cathedral, and near the semblance of an altar stood Hippolyta, the Lady of the Lake, who was Arthur's fairy godmother, in converse with the mysterious enchanted Merlin. When they were all in their places a silver bell rang, and the curtain drew up.

It was a striking scene and called forth instant applause, which was hushed when the orchestra, composed of harps and flutes, began above the great entrance a shrill weird music to celebrate the coming of the King. It was Lady May who had devised this wild welcome, so unlike the harmonies of the modern muse, but for that reason symbolic of far-off ages when the appeal was to elementary passions rather than to a complex temperament like ours of to-day. The effect was strange but overpowering. While it lasted, Hippolyta, who had not ventured to lift her eyes at the beginning, looked up and saw the vast spaces before her filled with a motley crowd, in all manner of fantastic and glittering attire,

while a flood of golden light fell upon them from the sides of the hall, where Rupert's grandly-conceived frescoes, marking out the whole extent they were by and by to cover, added an air of indescribable solemnity and antique grandeur to the vision. Never in her life had she beheld anything so beautiful. It dazzled and excited her; it gave her a larger sense of existence, palpitating with joy and passion. She could have been content, she thought, to gaze at it without going nearer. But in a few moments the music ceased, the curtain fell, and the Arthurian group, disappearing through the side-scene, was lost in the crowd below. She gave herself into the hands of the Countess and followed. The ball began; and Hippolyta, with mingled pleasure and dismay, found herself dancing with Rupert, who had instantly claimed her hand.

What she saw and experienced that evening, thanks to the novelty of her sensations, the secluded life she had led, the love which was filling heart and brain, the trouble of an uncertain future, and her joy in Rupert's triumph, it is not easy to describe. It was a whirl of excitement when time seemed short as a lightning flash, yet every moment eternal. The pauses in the dance, the bursts of barbaric music coming between, the delicate strange colours which had been so subtly combined in the grouping, the gleam of saffron and gold, of shining battle-axe and linked armour of steel, the perfume of tropical flowers which hung upon the atmosphere and pene-

trated her being, the steady blaze of light overhead, the sparkling of precious stones and waving of feathers and soft dark jets of velvet sheen, the sound of bubbling fountains in the conservatories which opened out of the ballroom into the garden beyond, —all this was mingled with laughing voices, with the play of outspread fans, and the movement of a multitude in whose eyes the light and the passion seemed to be reflected and to shine out again more intensely. It was a sea of life on whose waves, to the sound of enchanting music, she floated along. Sometimes Rupert held her hand, sometimes another whom she had never seen, to whom she spoke in dreamy whispers, not knowing what had been said to her. Out of the crowd a face surged up and gazed across inquiringly, as though seeking an answer in her eyes; but it was gone ere she could catch her breath and murmur, 'That was Lady May; what does she desire of me?' Or again, it was the Countess, smiling cold, inquisitive, mocking, as her voice floated over her shoulder and bade her rest a while in the shade of the cool ferns. And Rupert, where was he? She looked round in a vague, sweet trouble, and saw him leading out Lady May, whose earnest eyes seemed full of a steady fire. Could she not warn him, not rescue him from the danger? No, he was a thousand leagues away, and her hand could never reach him. As these thoughts came to darken the festival her heart beat faster with a sense of unspeakable love and pity. She felt that Rupert

was all the world to her, that she could not live except in the sunshine of his presence, that to surrender him would be death.

But her meditations were again and again interrupted as one after the other of these brilliant masqueraders came up to solicit the honour of dancing with her. Hippolyta was so wrapt in her passionate griefs and longings that she did not realise the impression she was making in that unknown realm, where faces, voices, manners, were all novel and strange. Miss Valence's name was whispered from mouth to mouth; her father's story, so much of it as the public knew, was rehearsed again. Some, who had heard only of the marriage with Lady Alice, imagined that this was a niece of Lord Trelingham, now publicly adopted by him; and they wondered whether Tom Davenant would select her or Lady May for his bride. Others felt her beauty enhanced by the uncertain tales of her origin, for no one in that country-side had ever set eyes on her mother or could tell who she was. And the young men declared with enthusiasm that they had never seen such dancing. It was the perfection of unconscious grace, without effort or affectation; the true Spanish gravity with a world of passion in it; the movements, slow or swift, as the music demanded, always under control, not wild, but exquisitely self-contained. That evening Hippolyta and the lady of the lake melted into one lovely lissom figure, clad in a floating vestment of dark fairy-green, with golden

hair falling down over the collar of wrought flowers which left the delicate throat bare, while a wreath of some strange bloom that resembled hyacinths decked the beautiful head, and gave her the look of sylvan majesty that befitted her in the legend. Nor had the warm paleness of her cheek, the light in her large, soft eyes, ever charmed the heart of Rupert as they did during those hours of dance and thrilling music. He could not turn his gaze from her; but it seemed to him that she did not always return it. Was she lost in the pleasure of the scene? He quitted the company among which he was standing, and came, on the pretence that she was wanted for the next tableau, and spoke to her. She answered like one whose fancy was roaming abroad; she was absent and preoccupied. When they entered the green-room to make some slight changes in her outward adornment which the tableau required, she did all in silence, as she was bid, not turning at the voice that spoke or appearing to distinguish the speaker. She took her place in the group of Launcelot and Guinevere, fixing her eyes, but yet absently, on Lady May, who bore with exceeding stateliness the character of the guilty Queen. Again, at the side of the painted forest, she looked on while the Countess Lutenieff, as the fay Vivien, charmed his secret out of Merlin; and her feeling was that, in the old white-bearded man, to her a stranger, who enacted the magician's part, she beheld Rupert yielding to the witchery of a maiden he did not love. When, from the floor of the Great

Hall, she watched the scene of Tristram and Iseult, in which Lady May and the artist quaffed the love-philter which was to bind them in unfaithfulness,—a weird and powerful representation that stirred the spectators to demand it a second time,—she could hardly refrain from crying aloud, and the effort made her weak to fainting. She leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes to shut out the displeasing vision. But it would not leave her; it was still there in vivid colour as on the stage, Iseult holding forth the enchanted golden cup, and Tristram in the glow of his beauty and strength bending over it, his lips touching the beaker's brim that was to take away his reason for ever. The plaudits which rang through the hall, and were drowned in the strains of music overhead, piercing like the sea-bird's scream and dying off as into the wash of a sullen sea, made a tumult within her which left no room for thought, which stamped upon her memory an impression that must be indelible, and urged her to resolve her doubts at once, without hesitation. She watched till Rupert came into the throng once more. He was moving her way, and their eyes met. In an instant he was by her side. 'You must ask me to dance,' she whispered, and ere long they were moving in the waltz.

Her dream came back: she was floating on the waves of life to the sound of a mighty music; its single tones shot through her like silvery arrows, its complex strains lifted her upon the thunderous roll of waters away and away, with Rupert, the only tenant of her universe,

holding her fast. He belonged to her alone, and she was of another sphere than the multitude moving in cadence around them. Still, she did not speak. And lo! the sudden vibration of a string which, for no more than a second, was heard through the music like a note of lamentation, turned her thoughts and her fancy. She beheld the world of suffering beneath the world of joy: on the barren shores lapped by these smiling waters an innumerable multitude were gathered from the four winds—all the poverty-stricken, the wretched, the homeless, the tear-besprent, the naked misery of those who crowded against one another to keep themselves warm, and who were reckoned by millions upon millions. She saw them clearly, with the mind's eye, too humbled and cast down to envy the joy they might not share, benumbed in their great misery by the sense of a long despair even more than by frost and cold. The masquerade of life was for the few; its bitter dismal reality, not tempered by dance or song, for the many. And what was she doing, Hippolyta, amid these splendours? Her place was not there, but with her brothers and sisters pining in wretchedness. She awoke from the excitement of the evening with a start. The air was suffocating, the perfume of these flowers delirious. She could endure it no longer. 'Take me away,' she said to Rupert as the dance was ending; 'I want the fresh air; I shall faint if I stay in the room.'

He looked round for the nearest exit, and, with Hippolyta on his arm, moved as swiftly as the crowd

would let him towards the conservatories, which opened on either side of the stage into the garden. It would be cooler there. They arrived at a spot where great cactus-like plants, mingled with creepers, stood up in the moonlight which shone through the glass roof with a cold, uncertain gleam. There was no one near. The feeling of comparative solitude refreshed Hippolyta; and her thoughts began to take a definite shape. Rupert inquired tenderly whether she were better. She smiled, and did not speak for a little while; then, drawing him close to the window where the plants screened them, she said, laying her hand on his breast, 'Rupert, were you ever in love with Lady May?'

The question startled him. 'Ah,' he said to himself, 'it has come at last.' But he would be perfectly open. 'No, Hippolyta,' he answered, 'never; but, before I met you, I might have been. For a few weeks I thought even that I was.'

'Did you tell her your thoughts?' she asked. She felt an immense relief.

'Never,' he replied; 'had I spoken it would have been to Lord Trelingham.'

'Then you are quite free as regards Lady May; you have incurred no obligation towards her?'

Rupert, who had not expected this home thrust, turned red and pale. 'I will leave you to judge,' he answered, though not immediately; 'obligation of any palpable sort there is none. I have made neither speeches nor advances to her; but I have shown

perhaps more sympathy when she spoke—it is now five months or more—than was prudent, since I did not love her.' He tried to explain. Hippolyta did not interrupt him. It was difficult to enlarge on the behaviour of Lady May without attributing to her thoughts of which he had no evidence.

When he came to a pause, Hippolyta, still looking at him, put a single question. 'Tell me, Rupert,' she said, 'do you think Lady May cared for you as I do?'

'As you do,' he repeated with fervour; 'ah, Hippolyta, who is like you in anything? I do not know; it is nothing to me what Lady May's feelings have been. You do not distrust me?' he went on anxiously; 'have I said or done anything to displease you?'

'No,' she answered simply; 'you are the same as ever. But suppose she did love you, could you always resist, always remember Hippolyta?'

'I see,' he said, 'you are troubled about it. Very well, I cannot blame a jealousy which comes of so great affection. Look here, Hippolyta, I also have been disquieted and not happy in this strange position; for, though I do not know what she feels, I have an uneasy dread that all may not turn out well. I had made up my mind to leave Trelingham for a month or six weeks, that there might be a break and a fresh start under less difficult circumstances. If you wish I will go to-morrow.'

'Are you not wanted here during the festivities?' she inquired.

'Not in any way. My work is done when the last of the tableaux has been given.'

Hippolyta, instead of answering, seemed lost in thought. Turning away, she walked two or three steps and stood apart, her eyes fixed on the waters of a mimic fountain which cast its spray around. What was she thinking about? Rupert did not dare to interrupt her. At length she came back, and, with an earnest, troubled expression, said to him, 'Go to-morrow, as you propose; it will be best. Only let me hear from you, and if I have anything to write,—you must give me your address.'

He put his hand to his pocket. There was no card in it. Tearing out one of his ivory tablets, he wrote a line or two in haste and handed them to Hippolyta. 'Write to my studio,' he said; 'I shall be there oftener than at home, almost every day, in fact; and there will be less chance of discovery. But I shall be glad,' he went on, 'when you allow me to end this concealment. It is a trial to both of us.'

'Yes,' she replied in her preoccupied manner, and said no more.

The crashing sound of trumpet-music came to them where they stood. 'We must return to the ballroom,' said Rupert; 'I shall be wanted for the next grouping.'

The words were hardly out of his mouth when they saw the Countess approaching, leaning on the

arm of a cavalier. She addressed Hippolyta. 'My dear Miss Valence,' she said, 'I have been looking for you this quarter of an hour. Here is a message from Falside which I have undertaken to deliver. I hope it is nothing unpleasant.' She held out her hand as she spoke, and Hippolyta grasped the note that was in it.

'My father's writing,' she said, as the superscription caught her eye. She opened it and moved towards the light. The others waited. It was a very brief message apparently, for she had read it through in an instant, and turning to Rupert, said, 'I must go home at once. My father is there, and thinks he may have only a few hours with me.' She stopped as if uncertain, looked from the Countess to Rupert and back again; but Karina would not move. It was impossible to say a word more, to bid the artist stay till she had seen her father, or go as they had arranged previously. The note was urgent. Andres had come with the pony-chaise, and she must leave the future to chance. 'Good-bye, Mr. Glanville,' she said. 'You will have to invent a lady of the lake for the Passing of Arthur,' and she offered him her hand, which he clasped fervently. But he would accompany her to the door. Madame de Lutenieff went likewise. They were fated not to speak in private, it seemed. Messages were left for the Earl and Lady May; a second time their hands joined; Karina gaily waved her fan, and the carriage drove off into the moonlight night.

In less than twenty-four hours Rupert, convinced that safety lay in flight, had left Trelingham and returned to his house in town. He could wait there for news of Hippolyta.

CHAPTER XX

WAS NOT THIS LOVE INDEED?

BUT a week passed, and no news came. Rupert, who had never been in love till he saw Hippolyta, and had felt that she was always near him at Falside, now discovered with joy and amazement, which gradually turned to unmixed pain, how closely she had been knit to his heart-strings. Her image was before him day and night; he consumed long hours in adding to her portrait—which of course he had brought with him—the touches that were to make it, not perfect, but less unlike the cherished original. He brooded over the words, the looks, the little loving tokens which had assured him of her affection. And he would have given worlds to see her again as on the night when, laying her hand on his breast, she asked him whether he thought that Lady May loved him as she did. But these things did not atone for her absence; they could not fill up the void. A sense of exile weighed upon him; and

when these first days were over, but for very shame he would have gone back to Trelingham. He thought of writing; but ought not her silence to be respected? She would hear that he had kept his word, and for the present it must suffice. He would not intrude on her privacy while Colonel Valence was at home. The resolution cost him an effort, which only ceaseless riding in the less-frequented outskirts of London, and desperate attempts at reading all manner of hard books in his studio, could support. Painting, except the touches above mentioned, was out of the question. He had not certified friends of his arrival, nor did he go near a club; his accustomed haunts were left unvisited, and he went hither and thither, like the ghost of Rupert Glanville, speaking to no one, taking no interest in the movement around him, or in the press and throng of the London season, which was now at its height. Not a soul, except the aged woman that took charge of his studio, and the housekeeper who presided over his establishment, knew that he was extant among the millions of the great city.

It had lasted more than a week, and Rupert, on a certain evening, was walking down the long dreary road, bordered with commonplace shops, the line of which was occasionally broken by melancholy-looking private houses, that led in the direction of Fulham, where his studio lay. The dinner-hour was past, and he thought of dining *extempore*, as his aged female called it, in front of Hippolyta's picture, which was

hanging on the easel. Then he would smoke a cigarette, and read or dream before the fire according to his feelings. It had been a chill day with much rain and wind. The clouds seemed to draw the night after them, and as he walked on, tired and dispirited, Rupert said to himself that he could not hold out longer, and he would write to Falside on the morrow. He wished there had been a star or two in the sky; it was one great blackness in front of him, and when he turned round to survey the road by which he had come, the dull flare of London shooting up into the heavens struck him as more dismal even than the darkness. He came to the lodge that formed an entrance to his studio, and seeing no one within, passed on and up the steps at the end of the narrow garden-path which led to it. He had the key in his pocket; but on trying it found the door unlocked. He entered, pushed aside the curtain which hung over it, saw candles lighted on the table, a fire burning bright on the hearth and sending a welcome glow through the apartment, and, rising from his favourite easy-chair—Hippolyta.

He could not believe his eyes. 'What!' he cried, 'you here, Hippolyta, darling? I am mad or dreaming.' He ran to clasp her in his arms. She drew back, but gave him her hand with a smile. He was all amaze.

'No, you are neither mad nor dreaming, Rupert,' she said quietly; 'it is Hippolyta, and I thought you would never come.'

'But you did not write, you sent me no word of your visit,' he cried; 'how could I imagine it? When did you arrive? Have you had anything to eat? What can I get for you?'

She sat down again, and motioned him to a seat near the easel. 'Be quiet,' she answered; 'what an excitable person you are! I have dined, and do not want anything except a cup of tea, which I will make by and by for both of us. You look tired, Rupert, where have you been spending the day?'

'Oh, I don't know,' he replied; 'it matters not. But are you staying in town? or how is it you come so suddenly?'

'I think you must have your tea first,' she said, 'and then we will talk about it. At present not a word more.' And she threw off her cloak and began to search for the tea things.

'You must let me help you,' said Rupert, his spirits wonderfully revived at the beautiful apparition. 'You cannot guess the geography of this place.' Accordingly, they were soon opening cupboards, bringing out the curious old bits of china in which Rupert took a certain pride, and, it must be confessed, getting a great deal in each other's way. At last Hippolyta insisted on his sitting down where she bade him, and herself arranged the low table in front of the fire. It was a cosy scene. The light played here and there on the quaint cups and saucers, brought out the gleam of the silver, and showed pictures, statuettes of marble, heavy crimson draperies,

and the confused mingling of carved woodwork, half-theatrical costumes, vases of flowers, painters' lay-figures, and pieces of shining armour, which made up the *ensemble* of Rupert's abode. Sitting there with the dark night about them, the rich folds of crimson drooping to the floor, amid a stillness hardly broken by the far-off murmur of the London streets, Rupert and Hippolyta might have fancied themselves in a world from which reality was shut out. He said to her, 'We have never been so much to ourselves as now. How still the night is! Can you imagine that London is at the door?'

'You are right,' said Hippolyta. 'We were not so much alone the first evening I saw you, when you dined at Falside. Do you remember the stillness then? But the thought of an immense city near heightens it. Ah, that first meeting! I suppose you are confident even now that you cared for Hippolyta as soon as you set eyes on her?'

'Confident!' cried Rupert; 'I know it, and so do you, although you pretend not.'

'And what of my feelings?' she asked mischievously. 'You would not, of course, allow them such a capacity for enthusiasm? You believe that I waited until you spoke, and then gracefully yielded.'

'Why, Hippolyta,' he said with emotion, 'I should never dream that there was anything in me to call out enthusiasm. You must not drive me wild with happiness.' His countenance glowed as he reflected on what she had suggested.

She went on. 'But you are aware that I believe in the equality of the sexes; therefore, if I like, I can suppose a woman's love to be as fervent and lasting as a man's. Nay, there may be love at first sight in us too, weak as we are.'

'Do you mean, Hippolyta, that when you told me your name at the chalet you were as much moved as I was?'

'Would you scorn me if I said so? Well, Rupert, I want you to be sure of this—when our eyes met for the first time our fate was decided.'

He looked at her in great surprise, as well as delight. There was a meaning in her words that he had yet to unravel. She spoke in clear firm tones, but her eyes were fixed on the ground.

'You are an extraordinary woman,' he said, 'and you have your own way of captivating a poor fellow. If you did, indeed, care for me as much as I did for you from the hour of our meeting, it is plain that we were intended for one another. And so we are. Nothing can separate us.'

'Dear Rupert,' she said, 'you asked me why I came. Let me tell you. But promise that you will hear me to the end and express no feeling one way or the other till I have said my last word. A woman's last word,' she went on, smiling for a moment, 'you think it will be long in coming. But no, it is a short story. Do you promise?'

He did not know what to make of her. 'I promise, surely,' he said.

She folded her hands over her knees in a favourite attitude of hers, and lifted her eyes steadily to Rupert's face. He could not help feeling excited, but he kept still.

'I must begin,' she said, 'with what happened after you left Trelingham. I could not speak to you in the Countess's hearing, or I should have begged you to wait another day. It was possible that my father would wish to see you. However, you had given me your promise, and I was not surprised on hearing that you had gone. I learned it only three days after, when my father bade me farewell and I was able to call at Trelingham. They were three busy days; and you will perhaps forgive me if, in the joy of seeing my father again, I put off, or rather could find no time to write the note I intended. We had so many things to settle. I told him our story. He knows all about you; likes you, I think, and said I must please myself. As for him, the summons he had been expecting for months had come at last. He was allowed only the necessary time to put his affairs in order and to say good-bye. I do not know whither he has gone. All I know is that he will have to run the extremest risk. I must be resigned, he said, if I never see him again. It is hard, Rupert, is it not?'

She was too much affected to go on. Rupert looked at her with pitying eyes. 'Is there no remedy?' he inquired. 'Could you not persuade your father to renounce the enterprise?'

'Oh, impossible,' she said; 'I know him too well.

When he decides that a duty lies before him he will go through fire and water; there is no holding him back. I did not venture on a word of dissuasion; but I said, as he was going, "And so, father, you leave me alone in the world." I could not forbear saying that. But he kissed me, and answered, "You will not be alone if Mr. Glanville is true," and without a word more he left me. Hush, you are going to speak and to violate your pledge. No, Rupert, wait. This is not the end of my story.

'I felt miserable indeed when he was gone. Towards evening the cottage looked so desolate that I resolved to avail myself of Lord Trelingham's hospitality, and occupy the room which he calls mine, the dear old man. It was dark when I arrived, and the place looked strangely quiet after the brilliant spectacle of the birthday festivities, the dress ball, and the *tableaux vivants*. The music of the dance had been ringing in my ears incessantly till I entered the vestibule; but there, under the sudden conviction that it was all over, that it had gone like a vision of the night, it seemed to stop. I felt that you were gone. Would not an instinct have drawn you from your upper chamber, brought you from the chalet, had you been there and Hippolyta at the door? Ah yes, Rupert, you love this poor foolish maiden, and she loves you, I think. So they came out and made me welcome, and told me of the pleasures I had missed by going home; and that you, to their astonishment, had not stayed out the festivities, but had been hurried

away on they knew not what business to London. And then they praised the tableaux, and we were deep all that evening in questions of Celtic poetry and the significance of the San Greal. Lord Trelingham asked me when my father would come again. I told him I did not know; that all was uncertain with him and consequently with me, but, as the truth was, that he had been pleased on hearing of my new life among these kind friends, and especially that I had witnessed the glories of the coming of age.

'The change and stir were good for me. I could not have borne the solitude of Falside. But I was haunted by a vague suspicion that Lady May, who is the least friendly of them all, had looked at me askance, perhaps because she imputed to my interference your leaving the Court. I could not tell, and I did not think much of it. Next morning, as I was sitting by the window where you found me that day, —you have not forgotten?—it struck me as extraordinary that there was not one of the family to be seen. Where could they all be? They had left me after breakfast and scattered as usual; but the long absence from the morning-room was not usual, at least when I happened to be staying in the house. I began to think what it might mean. Towards one o'clock, however, the Countess ran hastily in, and—you know her way—without preface or preliminary, threw her arms about my neck, kissed me in a sort of rapture, and cried out, "Wish me joy, my dear, she has refused him." I was bewildered. "She—who?" I

asked. "Refused whom?" The Countess did not leave me in doubt. "May has refused my Cousin Tom," she said, and danced down the room in wild excitement.'

Rupert gave an exclamation of surprise. He remembered the fragment of conversation he had heard, when walking on the front terrace, between the Countess and Lady May. The words came back to him as they had been uttered by Karina, 'Well, then, if you do not care for him, you ought to refuse him.' Had Tom Davenant proposed to the Earl's daughter? He put the question to Hippolyta.

'You shall hear,' she answered. 'When I could get the Countess to be still and sit down like a reasonable creature, she began, without pressing, to explain the events of the morning. She had been aware, for some time, that a crisis was at hand. Every one knows, and indeed she is not by way of making it a secret, that she wishes to marry Mr. Davenant. She told me as much herself at the outset. But it appears that Mr. Davenant some two years ago made a formal offer of marriage to Lady May through her father. The Earl did not consider it necessary to tell his daughter then, and insisted on her cousin's silence till he came of age. But the young man adhered to his resolution. At the earliest moment he could, when all the guests, including his mother, had left Trelingham, he went to the Earl and renewed his proposal. What passed between them nobody of course can tell. Karina, who never quitted her Cousin Tom's

footsteps during those days, saw him enter the library, and half an hour afterwards heard Lord Trelingham ring his bell. She was still watching when the servant who answered it went off again to Lady May's room, and the latter came downstairs—looking very much concerned, said Karina—and knocked at the library door. It opened, Lady May went in; and the Countess, steady at her post, heard a murmur of voices, one of which by degrees became loud and firm. The conference lasted not very long; and Karina, fearful of what might happen if she were discovered lingering so near, walked down the hall and stood by the entrance, pretending, as she told me, to be looking at the weather. She heard the door open again, and Lady May came with hasty footsteps along the hall. Karina turned as she drew near. Her cousin's face was hot and flushed; she looked angry. On seeing the Countess she paused, hesitated, and struck, as it would appear, with a sudden inspiration, walked over to her, and said. "Karina, you may marry Tom when you like. I will never marry him." These were her very words. "Have you told him so?" the Countess inquired. "I have told him in my father's presence; and now I hope there will be an end of this." Karina stayed to hear no more. She came on the instant to find me, whom she supposed to be in the morning-room; for, as she said, a joy that one cannot communicate is not worth having. And besides ——.' Hippolyta looked about and stopped in her embarrassment. She did not see her way to continue.

'Yes,' said Rupert, 'and besides? What other reason had she?'

Hippolyta heaved a sigh. 'These are curious confessions to make,' she said. 'You must know then, Rupert, that the Countess wanted to thank *me* for my share in the transaction. My share? I asked her what it had been, and she told me. I felt ashamed while she spoke. That Russian lady was born to make mischief, as you will grant when I tell you about her.'

'I grant it already,' said the artist; 'she is cunning and unprincipled.'

'Cunning, certainly,' replied Hippolyta; and she rehearsed the conversation which had taken place at Falside between herself and Madame de Lutenieff, delivering, as she judged to be expedient, a round unvarnished tale. Rupert was very angry; he saw now that his suspicions had been well founded. This woman would have set Hippolyta and Lady May at daggers drawn to achieve her purpose.

'She came to thank me,' said Hippolyta, almost in tears, 'for the admirable way in which I had played my part and stirred Lady May to jealousy, not only during the week before the ball, but on that evening. My sudden departure, followed by yours next day, she called a master-stroke. I could hardly find words, but I assured her that it was pure accident which recalled me to Falside. "Accident or design," she replied, "it could not have happened better. My Cousin May has been ever since in a state of the

deepest melancholy, and all idea of rewarding Mr. Davenant for his great kindness in proposing is at an end." I had nothing to remark on that point, and was silent. But she would not let me alone. She congratulated me on my philosophy, wished she were as detached from the world herself, and assured me I had done an excellent thing in helping Lady May to follow the path of affection. Her conclusion was, "She will now marry Mr. Glanville, and they will live happy ever after. And, my dear Hippolyta, it will have been all your doing." Oh, how can one woman stab another in this deliberate way!'

'Women of the world, as you call them, Hippolyta, are capable of everything,' said Rupert; 'they have no heart, or have gambled it away. And so, May Davenant is to marry me, whether I like it or no. I wonder what that lady herself thinks about it.'

'You will not wonder long; I am coming to that,' she answered very seriously. 'Karina had only just finished speaking when Lady May came in. I had often thought her a person of violent temper, but she was now in a state of excitement such as I had never witnessed. Her eyes blazed. "Karina," she said, "this is a matter on which the less secrecy is kept the better." And with that she turned to where I was sitting. "I daresay you have heard, Miss Valence, from my cousin here what has just taken place?" I murmured assent. "Yes," she said, "it is true. I have refused Mr Davenant once and for all. It is not, it shall not be a secret. You may mention it to

whom you please. Mrs. Davenant will hear, no doubt, that the offer has been made, and then all the world will know of it." Karina interrupted her. "If it depends on Tom," she said, "Mrs. Davenant will not be any the wiser. I am sure he will not tell her."—"Well, it is all one to me," said Lady May; "my cousin means well, but I am not going to be importuned. I will not stand in your way," she said to the Countess with a forced laugh. "Thank you so much," answered Karina in her mocking tone. "As I was telling Miss Valence, we shall read one of these days that a marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between Lady May Davenant, only daughter of the Earl of Trelingham, and the distinguished artist, Mr. Rupert Glanville."

'"You have been telling Miss Valence that?" exclaimed her cousin, drawing a step nearer. The Countess shrank away. "Well, why not?" she asked, still bent on making mischief. The reply seemed to stagger Lady May. "Why not?" she echoed absently. And then recovering herself, she looked straight into my eyes. "Would it make any difference to you, Miss Valence, if I did?" she asked in her loftiest manner. My heart sank within me. "You are the best judge of your own actions," I replied, showing as little feeling as I could. "Then you are not in love with Mr. Glanville?" was her question, full of mockery and malice. Karina looked on, amused. I rose; I would not wait to be further questioned. "Make my excuses, please, to Lord Trelingham," I said, "and

allow me to wish you good-morning. This is the last time I shall trouble you, Lady May." I was going to the door when the Countess interposed. She begged me not to take offence; it was her fault, her cousin meant nothing. Lady May stood perfectly silent, and I thought would not speak. But she felt, I suppose, that she had been guilty of a breach of good manners, and that it was due to herself to tender an apology. When she saw I was bent on going, she stepped forward and begged my pardon. She had not meant to be rude. She was excited; would I forgive her? I thought of the Earl, who had been so kind to me, and how my departure at that moment would make a reconciliation between the families more impossible than ever. And if I went, would it not seem a confession that you and I——? In short, I did violence to myself and answered meekly. But I could not stay, as they wished me, beyond the next few hours. My head ached, and I was, you may imagine how wretched. Mr. Davenant did not appear at luncheon. He was busy, the Earl said, preparing for his journey to Foxholme, where he had to meet the tenantry next day. The Countess was radiant, Lord Trelingham serious, Lady May sullen, like one that cannot forgive herself for seeming lowered in the eyes of a friend. I was glad to get home. I shall never, never visit Trelingham again.'

'Nor I,' said Glanville; 'I will acquaint Lord Trelingham by the next post that our engagement is

ended. My poor darling, how you must have suffered!' He would have taken her hand; but Hippolyta, who had drawn closer to him in the excitement of her narrative, stood up, and walking towards the fireplace, said, with her eyes averted:

'But why did I not remain at home? You do not ask me that. Oh, no,' she exclaimed suddenly, 'give up your engagement at Trelingham you must not. Honour is honour.'

'It will be only paying a forfeit which I can well afford,' said Rupert, 'and I cannot look Lady May in the face again after her atrocious behaviour.'

'Yes, you can,' said Hippolyta, speaking in a wonderfully quiet tone.

'How is it possible?' he asked. 'Do you think I could go on living at the Court while you were in a kind of exile at Falside?'

'I shall not go back to Falside,' was her reply.

'What!' said Rupert, astonished; 'not go back? Have you any other plan? What is it? tell me.'

'Then be quiet, as you promised,' she said; and with great seriousness, always keeping her eyes averted, she went on, 'Why do you think I came here to-night? To inform you that Lady May had hurt my feelings? No, not exactly. When a girl like me has lost father and mother, when she is her own mistress, alone in the world, without any one to look to for light or guidance except the man she loves, what do you suppose she ought to do?' Her voice sank to a whisper as she ended.

Rupert sprang from his chair. 'My darling Hippolyta,' he cried, 'do you mean to say that you will marry me at once?'

'I mean,' she said, as he took her to his bosom, 'that I am yours in life and in death.'

CHAPTER XXI

THE ORDINANCES OF THE GODS

THERE was silence in the room. They could neither of them speak or move in the flood of happiness which came over them. Hippolyta was the first to release herself, and go back to her former attitude by the fire. She waited for him to take up the conversation.

'Then,' said Rupert with a pleasant laugh, sinking back into the chair by the easel, 'I must get a special license as early as I can—to-morrow morning, if possible.'

Hippolyta gave him a curious smiling look. 'Who grants you the special license?' she asked.

'I don't know, I am sure,' he answered. 'I am not learned in these things. I fancy it is the Archbishop of Canterbury.'

'Do you believe in the Archbishop of Canterbury?' she inquired, still smiling. He, too, smiled at the question on her lips at such a time.

'Not a great deal,' he said; 'but he is an institu-

tion, a piece of antiquity. And we cannot be married without him.'

'Can we not?' she said. 'What a strange thing that would be! No, Rupert, we do not want the Archbishop's license, or any one else's.' The words sounded strangely on her lover's ear.

'You are excited, Hippolyta,' he said, 'and it makes you talk in a fanciful way. I care nothing for the license. We can be married by banns, in the old fashion, if you like; but it will take more time, and you will have to be called by Mr. Truscombe in Trelingham Church.'

'Not in any church,' was her firm reply. 'Listen, Rupert, I see you do not understand me yet. I love you with my whole heart, but I have not ceased to be Hippolyta Valence. Do you know how I have been brought up? I am not a Christian; I have no religion, except to follow my conscience; to live the highest life and help towards realising the noblest ideas. My father has taught me that all religions debase them. And do you imagine it would become my father's daughter, at the very moment he is staking his life in the battle for the future, to stand at a Christian altar and submit to institutions which he and I have renounced? I will never do such a thing.'

'But my dear, dear Hippolyta,' he cried in amazement, 'it is only a ceremony. It can do you no harm.'

'Yes, it can do me this harm—that I shall be acting a falsehood. I have neither regard for the

Christian ceremonies nor belief in the creed they express.'

'But surely you believe in the sacredness of wedlock.'

'I believe in the sacredness of love, but I will have no priest to utter his superstitious formulas over my head, or recite legends to which I must hearken while despising them, or pretend that you and I may not consecrate our hearts to one another without his leave. Nor will I submit to any civil ordinance. To bind myself before man would be more foolish even than to take an oath in the presence of a God I do not believe in. Why should you care, Rupert? You think really as I do; and yet you are the slave of old customs. Are we not alone in the world, simply given into each other's hands by nature and destiny? Can a priest bid you cease to love me, or change our feelings? Here is the marriage of true minds. Can he allege an impediment against it?'

Her beauty and eloquence of attitude while she spoke were extraordinary. Rupert could not take his eyes off her. A deep crimson dyed his cheeks; there seemed to be a singing in his ears, and a tremor of emotion ran through him which all his efforts were powerless to control. He felt himself choking. What, what demon, at once persuasive and malignant, had thrust Hippolyta into this frightful danger? How, good heavens, had she been so foolish, so innocent, as to confide herself, at such a time, under such circum-

stances, to a man who was passionately in love with her, casting away like an unsuspecting child the protection with which society girds about maiden honour? 'Oh,' he murmured, sighing heavily and turning away his eyes with a violent effort, while he set his teeth and grasped the arm of the chair into which he had flung himself, 'oh, to pluck this rose, this sweet, pale rose, breathing out love and passion! Oh, pale, sweet rose, to be trampled in the mire, its leaves rent, its fragrance gone, and I to be such a villain!' He would not look into those kindling eyes again. But the fire in his heart, how it surged, how it ran through his veins! It was the hot lava fire of temptation. No, no, he must not yield. 'How did you dare to come, you mad, impulsive child?' he cried, still choked with emotion.

'Dare to come?' was her quiet answer. 'Dare, Rupert? Not come to you because I dare not? Why, what risk am I running? Rupert will not harm me.' Her voice was low and clear; it never trembled.

'Not Rupert,' he said huskily, putting down his rebellious spirit with a firm hand; 'not Rupert, but the wildness in him, the passion you have so cruelly, so thoughtlessly——' He would not continue. Better not dwell on it. One moment of weakness and they were lost. He must be calm, find arguments against his own tumultuous feelings, against her innocent but most fatal delusion. But what reasoning could avail? She did not comprehend what she had been saying, what her principles meant, into what a

net she had cast herself. To her the world was utterly unknown. He could not reason as with one who would understand his half-words. Could he urge the example of society? She would laugh it to scorn. Custom, usage, respectability, how was he to make them avail where education had taken their value from them? There was no argument there. At last he exclaimed:

'But, Hippolyta, for my sake, darling; to please me, will you not do like the rest of the world? You shall be free as air afterwards. I have never given a thought to your religious views. You learnt them from your father, and it is not for me to say I know more about such things than he does. I was brought up in the ordinary way; I took my own line when I became a man, as you know. My friends would tell you, very likely, that I had not much of the Christian left in me, nor do I suppose I have. But some points we must observe till the world changes.'

'My world has changed already,' was her rejoinder; 'it has ceased to be the world of lying conventions and foolish worn-out antiquities. It is the world of truth and honour and love. If I could not promise to be faithful, if I were not sure of my own heart and of yours——'

'How can you be sure if we are not married, Hippolyta?' His voice trembled again. He could hardly continue. 'Might I not do as other men have done—be a scoundrel and desert the woman I had pretended to love? Where would be her remedy?'

He shook with excitement and the effort to keep it down.

Hippolyta fairly laughed. 'And do you think the Archbishop's license would give her a remedy? What a charm for broken hearts! Why, it would be a more powerful love-philter than Tristram and Iseult drank together on their fatal voyage.' A slight pang of jealousy shot through her; she could not forget the tableau in which Rupert and Lady May pledged their love on the evening of the ball.

'My dear child,' said Rupert, in his exasperation, 'you argue like a woman. It is not a question of feelings but of rights.'

'I argue like my father, who has often told me that the great wrong on which all modern institutions are founded is the divorce between feeling and right.'

'But he married Lady Alice. He submitted to the social ordinances.'

'He was young then, and his principles were not fixed as they afterwards became.'

'And your mother? a man that marries twice must surely believe in matrimony.'

'I cannot tell,' said Hippolyta, musing, but not, as it would seem, convinced. 'There was in the union of my father and mother all the sacredness which you, and I no less than you, prize in wedlock. But whether they went through civil or religious forms I never learnt. I do not think they did.'

Rupert, in spite of his large-mindedness, felt the shock. 'And is it possible, then, that your mother

was not married?' he exclaimed, with growing indignation against Colonel Valence.

'Quite possible,' she answered in a tranquil voice; 'not married as men speak who cling to the conventional. But she loved my father, and had no eyes for any one but him till the day she died.'

'I see, I feel,' he said, being utterly baffled, 'what an influence education has had on you. I am at a loss what to say. You are in the wrong; you do injustice to that highest nature you hold in veneration; and still, these principles are so novel I do not know how to cope with them. Oh,' he cried, in a tone of vehement desire, 'I wish Ivor Mardol were here. You could not resist him.'

'I do not believe he would take your side,' she answered; 'the side, I mean, which you are in vain attempting to defend. He is no disbeliever in the golden age.'

'Am I, then?' asked Rupert.

'It would seem so. You cannot imagine that two hearts, the most attachable that ever were, will be true to one another unless society—and such society!—clamps them together with iron bands. Ivor Mardol would rebuke your want of faith, not my trust in you. Come, Rupert, dear,' she went on, facing him now with her sweet and frank expression, 'let the soul of the artist within you burst these conventions, and float with me into a happier air. The old world is dying; it is nearly dead. Cannot you hear the rattle in its throat; these inarticulate gaspings of rites

and ceremonies, the meaning of which was emptied away before you and I saw the light? We are young; we have learnt how much of what people say they believe, and only say it, is false to the heart's core. What concern have we with effete aristocracies, obsolete religions, childish betrothals with ring and book in the sight of the profane multitude? The infinite expanse of the future lies before us, the possibilities of to-morrow. It has taken many a brave life to win this fair inheritance—the poets, the dreamers, the wise men and women who have not dreamt merely, but have begun to realise what they dreamt. On which side will you take your stand,—with the old, tyrannical, foolish, helplessly cruel past, or with men like Ivor Mardol and Colonel Valence, with women like—yes, I dare to say it—like Hippolyta? You do not know the consequences of one false step in a girl brought up as I have been to act and speak the perfect truth. Were I to do as you bid me, to go with you before priest or registrar, I should degrade myself beyond redemption. This, Rupert, is the woman's protest against the old bad order, her martyrdom if you will. It is for man to renounce honours, wealth, glory, the power which involves dominion over the weak, and is founded on their weakness. What can a maiden renounce? I will tell you. Do not shrink if I say it, conscious of the unsullied life I have led and the innocent love that is beating in my heart. Rupert, she can renounce respectability.'

He had listened like one amazed. She spoke with burning eloquence, and her eyes were bright and clear as she stood before him, her countenance glowing with enthusiasm, while with the fervent words her bosom heaved and fell. Rupert, in a taking of love and anger, was almost beside himself.

'Good heavens, Hippolyta,' he burst out, 'do you want to drive me distracted? Was ever such a situation? You do not in the least understand your danger or mine. Child, child,' he said, his face darkening, 'why have you dared to put yourself thus in the power of another, even though that other be Rupert? I will not harm you. God forbid. But see to it that you tempt me no further. Go, my dear, forget these wild and hurtling words. Let me take you to your hotel.' He looked round as he spoke for his hat and overcoat.

She laughed, no whit displeased. 'You must find my hotel first,' she said. 'I have no hotel.'

'Where is your luggage then?' he inquired.

'I brought hardly any,' she replied; 'what there is I left at the railway station. I came here direct.'

'Well, well,' he said uneasily, 'there is no harm done; we can call for it, and then drive you to some hotel.'

She did not stir from her place. With a long, earnest look she examined the expression of Rupert's countenance, where he stood by the door. He was impatient; he could think only that she ought to have an address in London and not be wandering

about like this. He would devise some means of persuading her to be reasonable to-morrow, when she had got over the excitement of the discussion. While he was in this mental confusion, she walked slowly across the hearth and came to him. He turned round. They were again face to face.

'Rupert,' she said, 'I am here. I am your wife. We have acknowledged our mutual love, which has no rival nor can have a successor. Take me as I am. I love you. I do not fear you at all.' She looked marvellously beautiful as she stood before him waiting.

'I will not,' he cried, 'so help me God. I am willing, nay, eager as love can make me, to marry you. But, Hippolyta, have pity on yourself, have pity on me,' he said in an imploring voice; 'see, I go down on my knees to you,' and he fell sobbing at her feet. She stooped and touched his cheek with her ungloved hand.

'No, Rupert,' she answered, weeping; 'I have my code of honour as you have yours. We will be married my way or no way. You must choose.'

'Then,' he said, rising with a groan that tore his heart, 'it shall be no way. I cannot, I will not dishonour you.' He did not dare to lift his eyes to her face.

'It is all over then,' she said in a faint whisper. 'Good-bye, Rupert. I have staked and lost. No matter, no matter. Let me go.'

'Go where?' he said, detaining her. 'You shall

not walk alone at this time of night through the London streets. I will accompany you as I proposed.'

Her look had a strange meaning in it. 'Let me go,' she murmured; 'I am not afraid of the streets. I know my way.'

'But you said you had no hotel.' He was resolved to go with her.

'I shall not need an hotel,' was the answer she made. She drew her cloak about her shoulders and attempted to pass him. Rupert had drawn the curtain aside which hung over the door, but he held the handle fast.

'What are you going to do?' he said.

'Do you imagine,' she replied, 'that I have spent all my resources in asking you to accept my love? When I left Falside I had reckoned with the contingencies of our situation. I knew what I was risking. My reputation—as you call it,—has not a visit like this, under these circumstances, blown it to the four winds?'

'Who saw you come in?' he said eagerly. He felt the force of her words.

'Your servant and her children,' she said. 'I gave no name, but my veil was up. They will be able to describe me.'

'I can trust old Martha,' he answered, 'if there was nobody else.'

'But you cannot trust me,' replied Hippolyta. 'I have put myself into your hands, and my character is dead. I have killed the Miss Valence who was, or might have been, a respectable member of society.

Can I be the same to you as if this had not taken place?'

He thought she was relenting. 'You can, you can,' he exclaimed with a feeling of relief. 'It matters nothing what you have said or done to-night. Let us forget it, darling; forget it, my own worshipped Hippolyta.'

'You mistake me still,' she said. 'I am not come to act a play. What I have done is a part of myself. If you take me with it you renounce the social ordinances which, instead of uniting, have almost separated us. But if you do not——' There was a long pause, or else the minutes stretched out in this spiritual agony.

'And if I do not?' Rupert said slowly, as if coming to himself out of a sleep.

'In that case, to-night will be the last of Hippolyta Valence,' she answered.

'Do you mean that you will——?' He could not finish the sentence.

'I mean,' she said under her breath, 'that I know my way to the river. I will go whither so many of my poor sisters have gone before me; and neither you nor any man shall hinder it.' And again she endeavoured to pass him.

'Stand back,' he cried out; 'you shall not go. You have lost your senses.' And even as he spoke the thought of uttering such harsh language to the woman he loved smote upon him. 'Dear, sweet Hippolyta,' he said, taking her hand, 'forgive me.

It is I that am mad. But do not be angry. Give up these wild thoughts. Be persuaded. I will do anything.'

'Anything but what I ask,' she said. 'Oh, I do not mind your hard words. But enough. We have seen the last of each other. We must go our several ways.' She was calm and resolute. Her eyes had gathered a brilliant light in them during the moments of their altercation; and Rupert, as he looked at her, thought she was the woman to do as she had said. If he let her go the river would be her resting-place ere morning.

Then began a fresh scene of earnest, impassioned pleading on his part and resistance on hers. He begged, he entreated, he grew angry and gentle by turns, he employed the most caressing language and all the resources of the lover's art, not as many a lover has done, to overcome the scruples of modesty, but to save this high and noble spirit, noble in its very aberrations, from shipwreck. He might as well have poured out his eloquence to the stones of the street. Hippolyta heard it all unmoved. She said once, 'I do not scorn you for trying to change me, but I should scorn myself if I yielded. Tell me that you cannot love me unless I submit to this mockery and I shall understand. But, even then, I will not give in to you. Can you tell me so?'

'No, Hippolyta,' he answered, 'it would not be true. This is no question of love. Whatever you become I shall feel the same towards you that I did

when you dawned upon me like a heavenly apparition in the Hermitage.'

'If our love remains,' she said, 'what can the rest signify?' and the contest broke out again. But it was not equal. Hippolyta, as she truly said, had thought over the contingencies of that strange situation, and was prepared for the worst. Her life, spent with those who were ever exposing themselves in the field or ready to mount the scaffold, had familiarised her with the idea not only of self-sacrifice, but of failure which has death for its price. The risk, she said, must have been undertaken some day, why not now? To persuade Rupert in cold blood, or by the use of arguments, was, she knew, impossible. One weapon which not even he could pluck from her hand, one last resource there was which left the man and woman unequally matched—and the man inferior. She told him plainly. 'Do not be a tyrant,' she said, 'and compel me to die. But this be sure of, only by yielding to my wish can you persuade me to live. Make the trial. Open the door and let me go, or quit me and do not return. In twenty-four hours you will hear news of me.'

What could avail against such resolution? Rupert said to her at last, 'Will you stay here and do yourself no harm to-night, if I leave you? Give me time to reflect. You may have changed your mind in the morning.'

'I shall not change my mind,' she said. 'But I will stay here on these conditions. Promise me to

come back as early as you can to-morrow and to look upon me henceforth as your wife. Promise, Rupert, and I will wait quietly. But if you do not return, or still insist on what I cannot yield,—you know the rest. My dear,' she said softly, 'you have to deal with a loving woman. Trust me and let us be happy together. Do you promise?'

'I promise,' he answered in a low voice.

It was like consenting to death. The room swam before him. But when Hippolyta heard the words her countenance lightened wonderfully. She became a naïve child instead of the resolute woman that had been pleading in that desperate and unparalleled cause. 'Now go,' she said, offering him her cheek to kiss. He touched it with his lips, almost shudderingly. She held the door open. He bethought himself for a moment before going, and said, 'You will find the means of making a fire in the morning, and getting a morsel to eat. Lock the door. Don't answer any one till I come. I will look in at the lodge as I go past and tell Martha she need not trouble about the place; that I have left it safe, and do not want it disturbed at present. You must not be surprised, Hippolyta, if I am delayed till towards noon. There will be many things to see to. And—and you will not do anything while I am away?'

'Keep your word,' she answered, 'and I will keep mine.'

He fled down the steps and along the garden-path. He heard the key turn in the lock. He did

not venture even to glance back, but ran straight on, gave a quick, brief message to the woman who came out as he passed, and with head down and rapid step took the road towards London. More agitated he could not have been had he left a murdered body in his studio. It was worse, he said to himself; he had murdered a soul. 'And yet not I, not I,' he murmured repeatedly, 'it is her father that has ruined her with his principles.'

He walked on and on. The winds were still up, driving the clouds through a beautiful stormy sky in which the moon shone bright at intervals. It had ceased raining and the streets were dry underfoot for the most part, though here and there a pool of water gleamed on the roadway, and all the scene reminded one of a chill March night rather than the end of May. There was a high-strung feeling in the atmosphere which harmonised with Rupert's excited mood, and gave him a vivid sense as though in comparison he had never lived till now. What had he promised? Was there any retreat from it compatible with honour, nay, with the existence of Hippolyta? And this, then, was the realising of all his hopes! Oh, bitter mockery! He went over the debate again and again. Why had he not urged this, why forgotten that? He had been too tame, too yielding; he might have pleaded more earnestly for himself. Hippolyta was generous, and if he had insisted on the injury to his own sense of rectitude, to his reputation, which had never endured a stain, to his happi-

ness, which must be sacrificed if they were to live in concealment or come forth with shameless foreheads before the world,—but what did it avail? The hour was past and his word given. To-morrow? It wanted how few moments of the day when he and Hippolyta should become outcasts from the world in which he had been brought up? And he was helpless, bound hand and foot by the devilish teaching of Colonel Valence. Who would have believed yesterday that the dreams of a revolutionist were henceforth to shape his life for Rupert Glanville? He had been content to dwell in the regions of the ideal; to put aside these questions, tossed to and fro by politicians and reformers, as vulgar, unworthy of the artist's consideration, fit only for debating clubs. And they had broken into his retreat and were clustering about his hearthstone. On him—him—Rupert Glanville, the crisis of the modern world had fallen.

'Why should it not?' he said with a bitter laugh as he hurried along. 'Am I so unlike the rest of men? Valence was right. The world is a universal shipwreck, and my turn has come to be thrown out on the waters. Every one must cling to his own spar. But how strangely, good God, how strangely it has come about! Hippolyta, so young, so innocent, incapable of hurting the tenderest thing,—all feeling, purity, and affection,—must Hippolyta be lost, and I be the instrument of her undoing? It is too much.'

He stopped and gazed up and down the silent

road, bewildered to such a degree that he knew not whether to turn back and try to persuade Hippolyta, or to leave it all to chance and depart by the next mail for the Continent. He could be ready in a few hours. He was now nearing home, and terribly fatigued with the excitement and exhaustion of the day, for he had eaten nothing since noon. To pack a portmanteau, write a farewell note, telling Hippolyta that a bad promise ought to be broken and he could not bring himself to do her wrong, then to drive to Charing Cross and catch the Dover train,—all this was still possible. He had almost resolved on it, but for the memory of her resolute pale face and her steady words, which assured him that she had not been acting a part. What should he feel if she carried her threat into execution, and he learned in Florence or Dresden that her body had been found defiled in the mud of the Thames, her sweet eyes closed for ever? No, he dared not risk it. Even death would not save her now; after spending a night in that fatal studio she was to the world at large dishonoured. She had spoken the truth; in paying such a visit her character was blown to the four winds. The falling snow was not more stainless, and yet she must bear about with her the penalty of guilt.

His thoughts, as he wandered aimlessly under the fitful moon and the wild clouds, took a fresh turn. He would not go home yet. He stood looking through the railings of the Park, and studied with an absorbed

gaze the misty lawns on which lay a film of uncertain moonlight, while the dark stems of the trees made a solemn background. 'After all,' so his meditation ran, 'who knows? Hippolyta may be right. What is the world's marriage but a ceremony? How many of us believe in it or respect it? Should I have let it stand in the way if I had fallen in love with a married woman and discovered that she was miserable? Fortunate for me, I daresay, that I never did. Things are all breaking up; it seems as if the lease of the old world had run out and the building had to come down. Certainly it is years since I entered a church with any belief in what goes on there. Have I any reason to become its champion? None, none whatever, except a feeble dislike to be pointed at as eccentric or a libertine. God knows I am no saint, but neither am I a libertine. How could I consent to the ruin of an innocent child? But she says it is not ruin. It will be a marriage of the heart, and why should I mind? If we were on a desert island, where there was neither clergyman nor registrar, should we hesitate to marry or think ourselves not married till one came? What is the difference then? For to me the social order is of no more consequence than a panorama which I see pass by, one view drawing after it another, and none of them lasting. I cannot answer Hippolyta's objections. Oh, why did Ivor go away? He would tell me what to do; he would find a solution. Is it only inbred custom that revolts in me, or something higher and better; is it the heart which will not

have its affection degraded, or a want of nobility in the intellect, fettered by chains of use? I cannot tell. Who is there that can tell me?' He lost himself in the endless discussion. The sound of a distant cab hurrying along broke from time to time upon his ear; but it died away into silence while he walked hither and thither, scanning the shapes and motions of the silvery clouds and the deep rifts of blue where the stars shone faintly. Was Hippolyta asleep at this hour, or pacing the studio in troubled thought as he was pacing up and down Park Lane? Again he felt tempted to go back.

He walked a few steps in the direction he had come; then, with a strong effort, frightened and feeling a chill at his heart, like one who has heard the voice of an evil being near him, he turned again and went hastily along the deserted streets, not towards his studio, but towards the river. He could not have explained what lugubrious fancy it was that led him on, neither pausing nor looking back, nor assigning to himself a reason for the way he was travelling, but still moving, as by instinct, always towards the river. In the weird and silent light, shed by a moon which gradually drank up the clouds and seemed to grow larger and larger, he caught a glimpse of his shadow, now in advance, now moving sideways with him, now emerging from the deep gloom of enormous buildings as a drowning man rises for a moment from the waves which are to close over him again. He passed a solitary figure at the turn of a street, and could hardly refrain from asking it

what business took it abroad at such an hour. He heard the steady march of a policeman pacing up and down, and the echo from the opposite side of the way, with something of the guilty apprehension that dogs an ill deed; he would have felt easier had no one in the huge city been awake but himself. And still he made for the river. A fresh breeze blew upon his forehead when he emerged from a narrow lane; he saw the vast shadow of the Abbey, and the moon resting over it; other shadows came, as it were to meet him and guide him on. In the quiet which had succeeded to the rush and tumult of a London day there was something inexpressibly awful and mysterious; something as terrible as death, for it came upon him like the cessation of innumerable lives, of myriad activities, like the lying down to a rest which might never be broken, so profound was the silence over it, of millions upon millions. And then he was standing alone on Westminster Bridge.

For that brief space of time, the river with its multiplied solemn lights stretching far away, the immense radiance of the moon quenching them in one place, contrasting with them in another, all that flood of dreary waters and still drearier memories belonged to him alone. It had no name, no associations with history, no taint of the vulgar day; it was a broad river flowing by a great wicked city down to the unknown sea. And in its deeps were the secrets of wasted lives, a vision of horror not to be explored by the boldest. Yet he would force himself to think

of those whom Hippolyta, the pure unsullied Hippolyta, had called her sisters, and with whom she had been willing to make her bed that night. Where he was standing, in another hour, let him but utter the word, she would be gazing her last on earth and sky. He saw her mounting the parapet, heard her cry of despair as the arches of the bridge echoed and re-echoed it in the stillness, watched her as she sprang, as she whirled through the air, as her body struck upon the rushing waters, and her golden hair floated in the light one instant, then was swallowed down into the deeps of death. Another of the pitiful sisterhood to whom suicide opens its ghastly arms, another folded in the embrace of the spectre that knows not how to help sorrow but by slaying! And was that to be Hippolyta's doom? 'Not now,' he said aloud, 'not to-night, unless I lose pity for the sake of I know not what poor forms and conventional virtues. It shall not be to-night.' He looked steadfastly down at the river, and from a great distance the whisper was conveyed to his heart, 'Not to-night, do you say? But another night may come, more desolate than this; a night when Hippolyta, degraded, ruined, forsaken, the cruel sport of passion and poverty, shall find her way hither, and looking round for one that loved her in the old time and is not near nor will come again, crying out to the silence to have pity on her, shall find no refuge but in these deeps of death. Are you willing that such shall be the end of your romance, of your loyalty?'

The great light reflected beneath seemed to be gazing at him.

Even as the fancy came he beheld—whether with the eyes of flesh or only with those of the spirit, who shall say?—the depths of the river lit up, its secret places opening; he beheld its slimy banks and muddy, festering floor, which some indescribable vegetation clothed and made more horrible, and the dark yellow waters rushing along, ghastly in a pale flame, which gave them a half transparency, and which illuminated that pathway of the drowned as if it were a mausoleum wherein sacrifices to the dead, or on behalf of them, were to be offered that night. He saw the multitude crowding upon one another, and again they seemed to be each in its own solitude; so that he was oppressed at one and the same time with contradictory feelings of a throng from which there was no escape save into the unlighted abysses beyond, and a loneliness where no voice came. His ear seemed to detect the sound of footsteps moving swiftly or slowly, but oftenest with the dragging gait of despair, moving from the distant city streets, from east and west, from north and south, from the ends of the earth, converging all towards the spot where he was standing,—a ceaseless, dreadful march of those that did not know one another, nor in this life ever should, but were contributing to swell one host, and precipitating themselves into a common grave. The river itself was peopled with the dead; but still the dead came hurrying, crowding, rushing with maddened steps, or

creeping as in a dream, along all the ways which led up to the bridge and into the flaming waters. There was no other sound than the march of innumerable feet, no outcry to pierce the ear of darkness and wake those that slept in their warm beds, oblivious of their brothers and sisters who, fainting under the weary load of life, came to cast it from them into depths where it should be found no more. He heard the steps behind him, around him; the pavements were alive with them, but the host marching forward was already enrolled in the ranks of death. And as they pressed down into the river, breathless, hopeless, with wild eyes and haggard looks, he saw the numbers of them that had entered into this sabbath of suicides rise in their dripping garments to meet their associates in crime and desolation. The multitude grew and grew; but there was ever fresh room as it moved downward to the remoter places, whence, as it seemed to him, the ascending tide was bringing a noise of the sea and of the night-winds struggling upon it. Here was the waste of the world, the human souls and bodies for which in life no room could be discovered nor a ransom given: here was a redemption wrought for others, for the happy among men, by suffering. But how unlike that redemption spoken of in the churches! For upon this no resurrection followed; it was an offering of victims whereof account was not made and whose pains had but one alleviation—that they were ended by death. Or was it possible that the great sea towards which the throng seemed to be moving

might prove more dreadful than the river? Had those old tales of the fiery deep, and the streams of lament and forgetfulness, any truth in them which made of suicide not only the dreariest but the deadliest of sins? What did that stony look in the eyes, what did that scared hue upon the cheeks portend? A wasted life might then be nothing in comparison with a self-inflicted death. The dark realms; the infinite shadow; the jaws which opened from beneath, in the deeps immeasurable; the grave that was but an entrance to a lower grave, which would swallow the living soul as these waters had sucked down the body, —yes, it was more natural to believe in them here, when sin and death met face to face. And was Hippolyta to join this multitude, to dedicate her purity and her young affection to the powers of darkness, turning from the glory of the sun to go down such ways into the everlasting sea, whence no bark would bring her again or any mortal?

He could bear it no longer. With these pursuing thoughts behind him, he quitted his station on the bridge, and hastily descended into the streets once more. He fled from himself, from Hippolyta, from the night, from the morning, which had almost begun to dawn while he looked into that awful gallery of the dead. He was utterly bewildered and undone. Conscience smote him on one side and on the other; whatever he should resolve would be wrong, and fatality was dogging his steps never to leave him. But for a little while, cost what it might, he must

become blind and heedless. He would go home, to rest if it were possible, and let to-morrow bring what it pleased.

In such confusion did he arrive, weary and chilled to the marrow, at his own house. He let himself in. The moon was still shining when he entered. Creeping noiselessly upstairs, he undressed in the light which came in at his window, and with a heavy sigh lay down to sleep. When he woke again it was broad day. A gleam of the early sunshine rested on his face; and he rose with an instant remembrance of the scenes through which he had passed.

'Rupert,' he said to himself between scorn and pity, 'is this to be the last day of your blameless life? Well, well; and what shall be the reward?'

He dressed quickly, swallowed a mouthful of breakfast, and went out. After walking through several streets, he looked round at a point where no one seemed to be in sight but the driver of a hansom cab, who was just then passing under the archway of a mews with his vehicle. Rupert hailed him, and bade him drive at his fastest pace to an address in the suburbs. It was a long way off. 'There is not a moment to spare,' said the artist as he sprang in.

CHAPTER XXII

EATING THE LOTUS DAY BY DAY

THE time is a month or so since Rupert's long drive out of town; the scene an old-fashioned garden, shaded largely with elm and lime, but with sunny spaces too, where flowers and fruits and vegetables seem to be growing side by side in pleasant neighbourhood. A hot July sun is sending down its floods of splendour, but little tempered by the specks of cloud which hang timidly in the sky, and are the remnant of a glorious fleece that melted into the azure some hours ago. Three o'clock is striking from the church steeple, which can be seen at some distance peering up through the trees; for, near as it is to London, timber of an honest, ancient sort is still plentiful all about, and especially on the long ascent of the main road, which within the memory of man was the High Street of a thriving village, but is now fresh named, to denote its absorption into the mighty maze of the great city. A second clock makes itself heard in a

second church, more modern than the red brick edifice which has served the parish time out of mind—more modern and much nearer, since only the garden wall divides it from the garden. It is a large, handsome building of ragstone, and will look picturesque when the mosses and ivies have grown over it and taken from it the too fresh appearance as if it had been built yesterday. Other houses, of many shapes and varying dates, but most of them counting their century, are within view, each with its own garden, and with rows of plants in bloom at the upper windows—for we cannot see the lower ones here. There is a quiet hum in the atmosphere as of business, which keeps the place alive and astir, but which has not overpowered its habit of retirement, of well-to-do leisure, of middle-class ease and plenty—perhaps one should rise to a higher strain and say, of refined gentility seeking to combine the neighbourhood of town with trim gardens, winding green lanes, a pathway beyond the palings over-arched with boughs like the boulevard of a foreign city, and detached residences, inherited from one's grandfather, or taken at a handsome figure for a term of years. The prevailing tone is red brick, intermingled with dense green foliage; the roads are hard and firm, with a layer of white sand just now overspreading them, from which rises an occasional cloud of summer dust. No railway station comes nearer than a mile; and the omnibuses which convey the pilgrim hither are less gaudily painted than those which perambulate the leading thoroughfares of Town.

Smart carriages roll from time to time up the ascent, which is now called in the street directory Bransmere Road; and their brilliant lamps, when in winter they draw up before various of these fine old mansions towards the dinner-hour, or stand waiting at half-past ten to take their occupants home again, are a pleasant sight under the trees, like the hugest of fire-flies resting motionless in the shade.

But why speak of winter on such a day? It is over and forgotten. All the doors and windows stand open, and on the road outside, which is just visible over the garden-gate, one can see the vibration in the air which is caused by a long and steady heat, and is the beginning—and as far as we ever get in England—of the mirage that works such deluding miracles in the countries of the sun. But there is a pleasant feeling of coolness in the central alley with its screen of overhanging boughs. And there Rupert and Hippolyta are walking side by side, slowly, as if to take in the beauty around. They are under the spell of this exquisite summer afternoon, when to live is simply delightful, and to be in each other's company the crown of joy.

Hippolyta speaks. 'I never saw a prettier old garden. It is full of flowery nooks where no foot seems to have trodden, places all tangled in roses and wildbrier, which some day you ought to paint, Rupert. I do not think I have thoroughly explored it yet. As for the house, I give it up. When I fancy the last door has at length been unlocked, the

last case of old china discovered, I find another door that I have overlooked in a corner or behind a screen, another room with curiosities enough to furnish a museum of jewellery, glass, and deep-hued porcelain. And the queer, old Dutch pictures, how odd and amusing they look! What a fairy palace to me, who have never seen such things except in show-houses abroad! I wonder you could live in London when you had this at your disposal.'

'I have not had it long to live in, remember. Nor, if you will believe it, should I feel, if I lived here, the inspiration to realise beautiful or odd fancies which comes upon me in that dark London house, or while I am endeavouring to save my life in crossing Piccadilly. I used once to think that an artist should paint with the loveliest scenes in view. But now I doubt very much whether it could be done.'

'Don't you feel inspired when I am here to be your muse of painting?' she asked with her bewitching smile.

He looked at her very tenderly. 'Inspired to work by and by; yes. But not when you are present. You send the sunlight into my eyes, and they are too full of colour to see.'

'By and by will not be long, Rupert,' she answered, no longer with a smile. 'Your holiday will be out in less than a week, and you must go back to Trelingham. How hateful! Why cannot we stay as we are, and you renounce fame as I have renounced society?' But, seeing him put on a serious look, she added,

'Now, you dear boy, smooth out that wrinkled brow. You know I mean nothing except that I want your company always, and grudge every minute of it. You cannot renounce your fame; neither ought you to throw up your engagement with Lord Trelingham.'

'I will, if you wish, Hippolyta. What keeps me to it but a sense of honour? Name and fame were much to me when I had only myself to live for. It is different now. I can paint pictures to please you, or to express my own feelings, as other men write poems or achieve greatness in war. But for the public, my quondam mistress, I care as little as you do for the flowers you plucked last spring.'

'Yes, yes, Rupert, you are brave and loving. But I am not going to make a Tannhäuser of you for all that, although I may be thought no better than my Lady Venus,' and she covered her face with her hands. 'You shall return to Trelingham; but what, oh what, am I to do when you are gone? Our honeymoon is past in a moment. So long as you are with me it seems that time stands still; I do not reckon it or mind the hours at all. But what a long, long day of emptiness it was when you went up to town last week! Time stood still in another fashion then. I thought you would never come home. For it is home, is it not, this old house in a garden where you have hidden away your Hippolyta? At least, I have none if it be not.' She looked sad in the midst of her happiness. Rupert had noticed it before. Was it only the thought of parting with him? He felt uncertain.

'I wish you would tell me, Hippolyta,' he said, in answer to her speech, 'whether you were ever melancholy at Falside?'

'I melancholy! what makes you imagine it? Not in the least. When my mother lived, we were the brightest of company; and though I felt her loss exceedingly, and do feel it, I should be telling you false if I said that I was melancholy about her. It was a different thing from melancholy—pure, unmixed sorrow.'

'Yes, exactly. I think that must be very true. But since, since you left Falside, since I brought you here, has there not been a shade of melancholy on your countenance? I do not mean always; it was there a moment ago. It has come back since I began speaking.'

'I cannot see my own face,' she answered, and would have said no more. But something prompted her to continue. 'A woman, I can assure you, Rupert, knows very little of her own feelings. She wants a physician of the mind to interpret them, just as we call in a doctor to make certain that we have a fever. You ask me a question I have put to myself sometimes, but cannot answer. Shall we talk over it? Will you be the physician to enlighten me?'

'Then you have been melancholy even in the midst of our great happiness,' concluded Rupert with a sigh. 'And what have you gained by quitting the old paths? Ah, me!'

'Do not be troubled,' she said affectionately; 'am

I not a woman and therefore subject to fears, to fancies, to overshadowing from those clouds of ignorance and superstition which have darkened the lives of one half the human race from the day it began? My reason tells me that we are, and for a long while must remain, the weaker sex, thanks to the institutions that have made us so. When I tremble and am afraid I know well it is the inherited malady which is giving signs of its existence.'

'And is that all? or do you repent of the step we have taken?'

'Ask me whether I repent of loving you! No, Rupert, I could not have imagined in my brightest day-dreams that such happiness was in store. It fills my heart to overflowing; and when you see me cry, as yesterday, you ought to think that it rains out of my eyes, for that is the reason, and will be, if I am agitated, restless, fervent. I must learn music to calm these wild transports. Have not you and I been in the golden heart of joy these many, these too quickly-passing days? I have felt like one suddenly caught up to the sun and allowed to wander at will through its glowing realms, with radiant lights on every side, and the dark earth so far away I could hardly tell where it was. Why,' she said, laughing, 'you will make me talk allegories, unless you say something yourself.'

'But still,' persisted Rupert, 'you have not always felt the radiance about you. The glory has changed, and melancholy come in its stead. Your tempera-

ment has been unequal; and once even, Hippolyta, I thought you avoided me.'

'Now you are giving me your own impressions, which may be nearer the truth than mine. It is such a strange, new feeling that you belong to another, and that the freedom of your former days will never return, is it not? Then, too, although what I did should be done over again to-morrow, if it were necessary, I am not the bold young lady you might have thought me, judging only by that night. I was bold at the time; and I daresay courage will never be wanting to me when circumstances are there to call it forth. But my resolution cost me an effort; the last part of it,' she went on, her voice sinking, 'more than I can well account for. I am sure that I do not fear death; and yet, since it is all over and past, my mind misgives me. I could not, indeed, indeed I could not have lived, Rupert, if you had sent me away. And so I tell myself when these sad thoughts come accusing me. It was not that I meant to alarm your affection; but when I considered the days I should have spent if we were to become strangers, I saw no motive for living. But I did in some way threaten you that night with what I should do, and now I am grieved over it.'

'Never mind, never mind, dearest,' he said. Their meeting in the studio was a thing he did not wish to recall; he had put it far from him, and not gone near the place except for a few hours, when he gave orders to have his pictures and painting materials

carried elsewhither. He meant never to set foot in it again. For him it would be ever haunted with direful memories. He went on:

'From what you say, it is partly reaction, and will go off when you are quite used to your new surroundings. Do not give way to it. I shall never blame you for the past, and you must not dwell any more, Hippolyta, on the accidents that have brought us together. If you can resolve, as I have told you with all the earnestness of which I am capable, to go through the ceremonies of marriage, civil or religious, I am here to fulfil my part. I will not torment you about it, or say a single word more except by your permission. But, at all events, should you feel regret or discomfort, you know the way out of it.'

'I do, I do,' she answered. 'You are generous both in what you ask and in what you give up. I am not melancholy on that score, and not much on any,' she continued, brightening. 'We have talked too seriously, Rupert. Is it not time to drive somewhere and teach me my way about these rustic lanes? I shall want to know them well when you are in the West Country,—a thousand miles away from me,—since I cannot follow you.'

'I will order the carriage,' he said. 'Go to your room and get ready. There is a drive along the brow of the hill which we have not taken.'

She ran up the garden with a fleet footstep, and was heard a moment after singing in her room above, as she moved hither and thither. Glanville, his eyes

and his heart full of love, gave a glance at her window, where for an instant he saw her dress fluttering when she passed, and went round to the stables a happy yet preoccupied man. What an inexplicable fate was his! The bright sky and summer hours, in which all things beautiful came forth to view, clad in their gayest attire, the very loveliness and wit of Hippolyta, seemed but to deepen his pensive mood. Their joy had been great—extreme; too great to last, he would murmur, when he looked on the countenance of his beloved, and observed in it the shade of some bitter or painful reflection, which, like a change in the evening lights, was gone ere he could decipher its meaning. But his own feelings were not unmixed either. He had spoken the truth when, in the long hours of that night-wandering about London, he described himself as no libertine. The record of his life held in it nothing that men count disgrace. It has been widely believed that genius implies or requires self-indulgence, and that only the Fornarina can inspire a Raffaelle. The creed, however, is uncertain, and Rupert's autobiography would, on the whole, have tended to disprove it. I do not say that he was immaculate, that, more invincible than Samson, he had never been 'effeminately vanquished.' But if he had now and again yielded to the temptation of a lovely face, a certain fastidiousness of sense held him above the vulgar range of low desire. He was serious, enthusiastic, given to labour, well content with Ivor's friendship instead of a thousand which

were to be had for the asking. When love came, he said, he would make it welcome; and he waited, not impatiently, till its day should 'peer forth the golden windows of the East.' He had not been thought the worse company for a little self-restraint, although in consequence he never went beyond civil terms with various great persons in the world of art. When, as will happen, he heard the moral code expounded with that liberty which is thought to betoken a mind above prejudice, he felt little inclination to assent. Ivor and he were agreed that a man may discard the official religion, yet be under strict orders from a higher court to respect human nature in himself. He did not pretend to be an ascetic or a Puritan, but at six and twenty, he thought, there was no need to be in a violent hurry; he would not squander his youth nor drain a cup to which the great enchantment was lacking. It might be interesting to discover when and how he came upon the momentous truth that love is of the spirit rather than of earth and the senses, or by what process he had convinced himself that no warmth of affection will compensate for the absence of respect. He believed, too, in love at first sight, and discoursed wisely on the reciprocal attractions that Nature has put into hearts of flesh no less certainly than into threads of steel and amber. But he would have resisted his drawing towards Hippolyta had she not seemed in his eyes a lovely, innocent soul of which outward beauty was the fitting apparel. And now——?

I should be describing a phantasm, and not Rupert Glanville, did I pretend that when the cup which held this great enchantment, running over with love, was pressed to his lips, he did not drink deep of its sweetness. Enthusiasm was part of his nature, and he resolved to make Hippolyta happy, and himself through her,—happy as they could be in the abundance of their varied gifts, the freshness of youth, and the enjoyment of love. Putting the world out of view, dismissing every thought of the future, leaving his reputation as a man, his fame as an artist, to take care of itself, Rupert—not unlike the knight of love to whom Hippolyta compared him, but with eyes open and will determined — had come into the Venusberg and was willing to spend, not seven years, but his life to the very end with the lady of his devotion. If, on the one hand, he felt compunction for the daring step she had taken, on the other it was a dream of his earliest days to sacrifice himself to another. 'All for love and the world well lost.' Those were words he would have inscribed on his stainless shield, and counted them a consecration. Had Hippolyta required only the ordinary sacrifice which men approve, because it is cast in moulds familiar to them! But what was this new virtue rooted in something which to the common judgment looked like vice? Well, he did not dwell upon it in the first days of their life together. He shut out the judgments of society. Away from Trelingham, from London, where his letters lay neglected, in a house

that had few associations with his previous existence, and seeing every moment a companion whose charm grew with the increasing confidence of their intercourse, who suffered from no misgivings as to the legitimacy or the unchangeable character of their relations, but was tranquil, and modest, and delightfully original in whatever she said or did, it is easy to understand how Rupert, like a man carried out to sea upon a great wave, was unable to return upon his former thoughts or to resist the current which drove him onward. He might rue it bitterly afterwards, when the wave was spent or the returning tide had cast him on shore. But there is a strong fascination in the opinion of another when it confirms or excuses our own. Hippolyta did not move, she did not look like a being upon whom degradation had fallen. She kept in her eyes that gaze of seraphic astonishment, as it has well been termed, which, when Nature fixes it in the human countenance, would persuade us against our senses that innocence dwells within. Its light was subdued by melancholy at times; and who, with the tender feelings of Rupert, could rebuke her then? He melted into adoring pity, into a childlike devotion that knew no bounds, and that uttered itself in terms which breathed the affection, the seriousness, the playful, half-deliberate simplicity of the heart when it is touched to the core.

The house to which he had taken her seemed made for a romantic chapter of existence such as they were going through. It had belonged to Rupert from

the time he was at school, having been left him by an ancient lady, his grand-aunt, to whom he was very dear, though she seldom was in a state of health which permitted her to have a talkative and rather troublesome boy in the house. He had therefore seldom been on a visit at Forrest House, nor, it must be admitted, did he look forward to staying there; for it seemed to his juvenile apprehension dark and gloomy, full of uninhabited corners, and not lightened up by the extremely white face and long trailing garments of black silk, and the black lace shawls, which made up for him the impression of his grand-aunt. He liked her in his general way of liking all who were kind to him. But he was glad to be out of doors whenever Miss Atterbury would allow him to run about, and at other times to stay with the Dutch pictures and explain in his own mind the scenes which they delineated. When his grand-aunt died he attended her funeral; and he remembered, but not well, being told by a gentleman in black, who proved in after years to be the family solicitor, that Forrest House and the properties thereunto appertaining were his own, to be held in trust till he came of age. He thought little on the subject; his father's small estate, lying on the borders of Shropshire, and in a beautiful hilly region, pleased him much better than this old red mansion, nor did he for a long while understand that it brought him a not insignificant part of his annual income.

Immediately on the old lady's death it had been

let, furniture and all just as it stood, to another lady not quite so old. She survived till Rupert was five and twenty; but he never had occasion to make himself known to her, and did not see Forrest House for a good fourteen years. Her death left it vacant; and the family solicitor was looking for a suitable tenant when Rupert, to his own great astonishment and with a feeling of shame, informed him that he might spare himself the trouble, and that the house was disposed of. What sort of person the incoming tenant was, or on what terms he had taken the place, Glanville did not say.

On driving thither that morning he had dismissed the cabman at the door, and showing a card from his solicitor to the housekeeper, who had never set eyes on Glanville, he went over the principal rooms. They were in admirable condition, and needed but some few alterations to fit them for Hippolyta. He gave the orders at once, stating his intention of taking possession that very afternoon, and assuring the housekeeper that she should receive a telegram from the solicitor which would authorise these prompt measures as soon as he had reached that gentleman's office. She inquired the new tenant's name. He had not thought of one, and did not answer on the spur of the moment. To the housekeeper he seemed rather absent-minded; but the fact was that he could think of no other name than his own. 'The solicitor will tell you,' he said; and he hurried away. He called the first cab which he saw going down the

descent, and paid a hasty visit to his man of law, during which it appeared that Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm, intimate friends of his, wanted the house, and as they happened to be travelling in the neighbourhood would like to make trial of it at once. He was decisive and peremptory; dictated the terms of the telegram lest there should arise difficulties at the other end; left the solicitor's office the moment all was concluded, and on the stroke of noon entered the studio. Hippolyta was expecting him. No words passed between them except the brief sentences in which he asked whether she was ready, and what she proposed to do with the luggage she had left on arriving from Falside. It was thought prudent to take it with them; lost or relinquished luggage gives rise to inquiry; and they drove together, for the first time—these engaged lovers—in a London cab, not speaking one word as they went along. They did not even clasp hands. A feeling of some decisive event taking place, too grave and solemn for the expression of any sentiment, was in the hearts of both. Thus they set out on what seemed the interminable drive to Forrest House, and arrived about six o'clock. It was not twenty-four hours since Hippolyta had alighted in Rupert's studio.

But with the change of scene and of name—for to the latter precaution Hippolyta, though very reluctantly, gave her consent,—with this, I say, their solemn feelings vanished. The artist had disappeared; the young lady of Falside was known no more. Mr.

and Mrs. Malcolm, a young married couple, ardently attached to one another, never seen apart by the neighbours who observed that Forrest House had been let, and unobserved by the rest of humankind, were living a fantastic, yet a real existence, which seemed to dispense with all ties of duty or obligations towards their fellows. They had but one duty, to be in each other's company at all times; but one obligation—which they did not appear to think a burden—that of loving one another. They fleeted the time carelessly, as in the golden age. They received no letters, read no journals, received no visits. The old housekeeper had strict injunctions not to admit callers beyond the gate; and when Sunday came, she was perplexed and horrified on seeing that neither the young lady nor her husband went to church. They might indeed be Roman Catholics, and were perhaps ignorant that the Gothic edifice on the other side of the wall was of that persuasion. She gently hinted as much to Mrs. Malcolm on the Monday morning; but no, Mrs. Malcolm said they were not Roman Catholics. And during the four Sundays of their stay hitherto they had not seen the inside of a sacred building. They spent the Day of Rest exactly like the other six days of the week, in painting and singing, and exploring the old house, and rambling about the garden hand in hand, or driving among the more sequestered lanes. Only once did Mr. Malcolm go up to town; and Mrs. Malcolm passed the whole afternoon near

the garden-gate, sometimes opening it to look down the road, as though by looking and wishing she could bring him home a little earlier. When he did arrive she was overcome with infantine joy, and laughed and sang, and danced a step or two about him as they went up the path together. Neither housemaid nor housekeeper—there were only these servants indoors—had seen a bride so unmistakably in love. And the bridegroom seemed equally enchanted.

It was so indeed. Their attachment, sudden as on both sides it had been, like the outburst of birds in springtime under the influence of the newly-brightening sun and fresh warm air, was deep as their nature. Rupert, whose mobile temper and susceptibility of imagination added an intense earnestness to whatever he undertook, was now wrought up to a pure enthusiasm in which he felt like an actor in some great tragic movement, the *dénoûment* of which—as on the Roman stage when an emperor commanded—might become not acting but reality. He had lived much alone, and had acquired that turn for concealment or reserve which would have led him, without much pressing, to join in any kind of secret undertaking, provided it were not dishonourable. A secret marriage would certainly not have shocked him; and in keeping acquaintance at bay, inventing expedients which might throw them out, or making covert journeys into the blue distance, he would have been as fertile as the heroes of Dumas or Eugène Sue. But then, a secret marriage need not be dis-

honourable. And was the loyalty which now engaged him to live under cloud of night a thing to be ashamed of? or had he not done his best to persuade Hippolyta, and could he now by taking measures compel her to submit to the ways of the world? He would not do it, he said to himself; in all but name theirs was a true marriage; and the sense of mystery heightened his passion. Great as is the force of public opinion, and in various respects more potent than ever it was, it has nothing sacred about it, and a man who chooses to live out of society, or to live in it and be wary, need not fear that his individual freedom will suffer or his comings and goings be severely scrutinised. There are so many standards in the field, that he who does battle against one is pretty sure to find the folds of another waving over him. Rupert, indeed, could not have explained to a man of the world on what conditions Hippolyta had become his without exposing her and himself to ridicule. He would have been asked in a bantering voice why he sought far-fetched reasons for what was the simplest thing imaginable. But very few would have inquired, and still fewer cared to know, why Miss Valence had accepted him. All that society demanded of Rupert was to keep his own counsel, go his way, and observe the proprieties. Whether he lived a double life—was Mr. Glanville the famous artist in Belgravia, and Mr. Malcolm the idle young gentleman at Forrest House—concerned nobody but himself. The penalty was for bringing these things on the stage.

And Rupert, who was well acquainted with the rules of modern society, although hitherto not called on to practise this particular one, felt by turns amused and melancholy,—amused at lying *perdu* in such a way when he ought to have been cultivating life in London drawing-rooms and enjoying the season; melancholy that it was for Hippolyta's sake he had put on the outward seeming of an ill-regulated life. He shrank from the question how long it might continue. He was in the fairyland of first love, of reverie and romance, of innocence which took on the colour of guilt, and of guilt which seemed primeval innocence. The world of every day might be near, but it was on the other side of the mountains which made a steep inaccessible wall between it and them. The lovers had only to forget; there came neither voice nor portent out of the rosy sky under which they roamed, or from the trees of the forest which grew up, friendly and large-leaved, around them.

No portent out of the rosy sky; but still, as we have seen, a something in Hippolyta which, like the thinnest cloud, was visible to another, to Rupert, not to herself whom it passed upon. She would be momentarily pensive, leaning her beautiful head upon her hand, with such tender, thoughtful grace as that of Juliet meditating in the balcony, while Romeo stands watching her. But she did not know why she should be less gay at one time than at another. It was a novel experience; for though she had gone through suffering in childhood, she had not dreamt sad dreams as she did now.

CHAPTER XXIII

GO NOT, HAPPY DAY!

THE explanation which lay close at hand, which indeed Rupert would have been almost glad to receive, that she repented of her daring, and was ready, though ashamed of confessing it, to go through the form of marriage, did not even occur to Hippolyta. It was not true. A universal nonconformist does not feel the shock of any one act which, by itself, would be a challenge to society at large. Why, then, was she melancholy? She did not know. And, like the determined character she was, she formed a resolution to shake it off. Perhaps it came from having so little to do. She had not been taught to spend her days in amusement, but in labour; and this life of silken ease did not agree with one whose care had been extended not only to the management of Falside, but to the large correspondence which she received or transmitted on behalf of Colonel Valence, and whose exercise had been riding over a wild country.

'It must be that,' she said to Rupert, as they were driving after the conversation we have recorded. 'I am much like a peasant girl in my tastes; and although these hours of talking and moving about the garden are exquisitely dear to me, they suppose habits, good or bad, which I have not acquired. You artists, I see, are indolent by nature; you get enough outdoor exercise by fancying the landscape you are going to paint, or, perhaps, by looking at one you have painted. But we poor creatures of clay must gallop over the fields, plant the trees, and mow the grass which you are content to be gazing at. Tell me what I should do, not what I should be or suffer; for I was made for action.'

'You talk,' answered Rupert, with his ironical smile, 'like a great philosopher—I forget his name—who said that action was the end of life. It is a doctrine that doesn't agree with me. The art of doing nothing demands unusual genius in this wretched country, where everybody seems to have lost the knowledge of its existence. But it is a very fine art indeed.'

'I daresay,' answered Hippolyta, who had her own small gift of irony; 'and you practise it, don't you, Rupert, when you spend every hour of daylight painting, and all the dark hours in thinking over what you are going to paint?'

'I knew how to be idle once,' he replied, 'but it was in my better days, when the first delight of inspiration made work not only impossible but absurd.

I should then as soon have thought of painting my imaginations as Adam of leaving Paradise to make himself a plough and raise corn in the North-Western territory. My Paradise was within. What did it matter to anybody else if I did not work? I was happy.'

'What made you work at last?' she inquired.

'I do not know. Ambition, I suppose. Or it may have been the awakening of a new faculty which the books describe as the need of expressing one's self. It is a curious law that when we have gone on thinking a certain time we must tell our thoughts to somebody else. Murder will out, and so will genius.'

'And love, too,' she said, blushing. 'You have forgotten that.'

'Oh, love,' he said, 'of course; but love is such a born babbler.'

'I was thinking of another kind of love,' she went on when he stopped; 'you must not laugh at it, although in you it has not awakened yet—that love which my father calls philanthropy! Don't you think there may be a passion of pity, a desire to help human creatures because they are human?' She seemed a little anxious to hear what he would say.

'My dear,' he answered, 'Colonel Valence is a man of remarkable character and pronounced opinions. I was not brought up in the same school. I dislike the sight of misery—at least,' he added with a smile which showed he was not serious, 'when it does not lend itself to picturesque treatment. But in abstract

virtues I have very small confidence. To me the human race seems too large a thing to care about. To tell the truth, I don't care about it. But,' he sad, looking at her, 'you have a motive in asking me. What is it, dear? In you these abstract virtues become a quality I can love. Do you want me to turn philanthropist? I will try, though I warn you the attempt will most likely prove a dead failure. I am no Abou Hassan, if that was the good creature's name that begged the recording angel to set him down as one that loved his fellow-men. I neither hate them nor love them. What I say to them is, you let me alone and I will let you alone. But I can try, you know.'

'It is not that,' she answered; 'I was thinking rather of myself. When you are away from me, what shall I do to keep myself alive? There is nobody to visit, and I could not subsist on visiting, if there were hundreds. You have forbidden me to engage in household work, so that will not be a resource—at least until I have coaxed you into a better mind. Reading, practising music—oh dear! what are these but the make-believe employments of a fashionable young person who knows no other way of killing time? I do not wish to kill time, but to live, and it has occurred to me that I might take lessons in my proper profession—of looking after men and women in distress.'

'But can you go about and not be discovered?' he asked, with the uncertain accent of a man who

would like to refuse, and yet was willing to yield for love's sake.

'Why should I be discovered? The only human being that has an interest in me besides you, Rupert, is my father. If I could have foreseen these events I would have asked his guidance. Now it is too late. He gave me no address; he said that there was none to give, and I must wait patiently for his return—if return should be possible to him. Our old Dolores will send me the message when it comes. As for others, who is there? I am quite alone, without friend or relative in the world. The change of name will be enough to guard against accidents. It would be another thing were you to accompany me, for you have, unluckily, celebrated features; and others besides Mr. Davenant might remember the portrait in the Academy. But, sir, you shall not come anywhere within reach of my poor.' She gave him a charming look.

'And will you, Hippolyta, promise not to visit houses where there is infection? I shall not consent otherwise,' he said in determined accents.

She reflected before answering. 'I do not think it is quite right to promise absolutely. How could I visit on both sides of an infected house and shrink from entering there? But since you are lord and master, I will engage never to do so without consulting you first. Will that satisfy you?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'for I shall never give you per-

mission.' And so it was settled, and Rupert turned the horses' heads towards home.

They spent the rest of the evening in making arrangements for his departure, and planning methods of correspondence. The latter was not easy. Hippolyta, as they were sitting after dinner in the twilight, looking out on their garden, suggested that Mr. Glanville might write direct to his friend Mr. Malcolm at Forrest House; and if Mrs. Malcolm answered for her husband by writing to Mr. Glanville's house in town, whence her letters should be sent on under cover, there would be little chance of detection, especially when she had mastered the new style of caligraphy whereat she was now diligent. To provide against accidents they fixed on a set of enigmatical expressions, which might be inserted in the *Times* if other channels of communication were not speedy enough. And, at the worst, Mr. Malcolm could telegraph from Forrest House to Trelingham Court. These young people grew merry over the difficulties in which they found themselves. It seemed an excellent, and might prove an exciting, game of hide-and-seek. They did not trouble about the distant future. One thing must be done at a time, one business put out of hand. When the designs in the Great Hall were pretty well complete, Rupert fancied he might leave the rest of the details to one of his friends. In that case they would leave England and fix their home in France or Italy. Much might depend on the adventures, in regions whither Glan-

ville could not follow him, of Colonel Valence; something, too,—the artist murmured in a low aside, —on the development of Hippolyta's character under these novel influences, and with so great a break between her present and her former life. At any rate, they would not stay in England a day longer than was necessary. None are so free as English travellers on the Continent; they have slipped the collar of their dear native habits, and their reputation, gained at the cost of some eccentricity during the last seventy years, is now well established as men and women who are a law unto themselves. The essential thing was to get quit of Trelingham and its associations. Denying themselves a longer *tête-à-tête* now was the sure means of making it perpetual hereafter.

But when, on the morrow, Rupert was gone, Hippolyta shut herself up in her room. She left untasted the dainty meal which had been prepared by the housekeeper. She had never felt so lonely in her life. Sitting at the window whence they had gazed out together at the fading light, and enjoyed the perfumes of the garden beneath them during the long evenings of June, she went over the thoughts they had shared, the words of affection and trust they had spoken. For one short month she had known what human companionship was in perfection; she had tasted the honey-sweet nectar, and its delight, mounting to her brain, had filled every little act and momentary interchange of feeling with unspeakable poetry. This, then, was the crown of life—to love and to be loved; there

was nothing beyond it, nothing to compare with it, nothing that would compensate for its loss. But why should she fear to lose it? Rupert was frank and faithful; what greater proof could he have given of his ardent devotion? He would never be false; the heaven of their love was sure. And yet, and yet, how melancholy was her feeling now he no longer sat by the window, telling her of the thousand things he knew! A few months ago he was a stranger whose life or death mattered to her not at all; now he was her world, her paradise, her god.

While she stayed in her attitude of wistful reflection, and the sky grew clearer and the faint hues of sunset died away into a steely twilight, the forerunner of the stars which by and by would rise in the summer night, she heard the sound of music, of an organ playing and voices accompanying it, in the church whose southern windows were visible from her own. There were lights within, and the stained glass, which must have looked dark to the worshippers, had now become faintly transparent on the outside, showing, although in dull confusion of colour, the forms of saints and angels, of quaint vestments and broad glowing wings, crimson or ruby, intermixed with the gold of sceptres, crowns, Gothic lilies, and other medieval symbols. It was a fantastic, unreal vision, as of life in a child's picture-book, or on a long roll of tapestry, unlike anything we see walking the world, without perspective or proportion, but perhaps for that reason appealing to a sense of dim possibilities which lurks in our severest

calculations and is never more awake than when we have lost what we prize. Hippolyta, still chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy, at first took no notice of the stained windows; yet the vision pleased her unawares, the medley of colours made her smile, and if it did not soothe, it distracted her. Imagination played among them and endeavoured to make out the innocent child-faces which were seen in reversed outline, yet even so preserved something of their comeliness, and grew fairer as the evening closed in about them. It was a large building, and the windows stood high between their buttresses. More and more distinct and solemn pealed forth the tones of the organ; its music rolled along the painted windows and seemed to be echoed back from the farther end of the church; while the voices of the choir, coming in from time to time, rose and fell in a slow religious chant, subdued to perfect harmony where Hippolyta sat listening,—or could it be called listening? for she heard the voices as she might have heard the winds in a forest, not heeding them, though allowing her thoughts to be influenced by their unceasing murmur. She did not know what the voices sang, why the lights were kindled, or the painted windows began to blaze at that hour. These things did not enter into her life, but they exalted and in some degree pacified her melancholy, connecting it with the grave enthusiasm of the unknown rite, with old-time memories and the sadness of the world. It seemed as though out of the darkness had risen a company, strange to her and never before seen,

which in language incomprehensible yet significant chanted their sorrows, their hopes, their dim aspirations, telling her that she was not alone in the troubled night. They were human beings, not supernatural visitants ; but, hidden while they sang, they might have put off the grotesque accidents of humanity, its vulgar habiliments and grossness of surroundings ; they were spirit-voices, uttering themselves from a heart like her own. She listened more intently, and that heart melted. Sweet tears began to flow, tears of compassion, at first for herself, and then for she knew not what, — for the grief which makes men and women desolate, for the heavy fate that weighs upon our mortal frame, for the hope that is long deferred. Her thoughts wandered away from Rupert into realms of vague surmise and meditation. It was an experience not unlike that which had befallen her on the evening of the ball, when amid the strains of joyous music one single note of wailing had brought her the vision of the suffering multitude. But in the great bursts of organ music there was nothing discordant or lightly mocking ; hope and pity were blended in the enunciation of a harmony without end. She did not despise herself for letting the floods of this sacred music pour in upon her soul, as she had been tempted to despise herself during the waltz. For it seemed to her that all the sweetness was purchased here by self-sacrifice, by fellow-feeling with them that suffered, — the great article of her creed early and late. She could not have told when the organ ceased. Her mind was far away.

CHAPTER XXIV

MANIBUS DATE LILIA PLENIS

WHEN Rupert returned to Trelingham he found many things changed, nor was the prevailing tone similar to that which had struck him on his first arrival. One may truly say, with the French proverb, that love had passed that way; and though its effects were not visible on the surface, they were none the less real. Tom Davenant, twice foiled in his endeavour to make his cousin the heiress of her father's property, was gone; nor did it appear when he would return, if ever, during Lord Trelingham's lifetime. He was now in London with his mother, desperately uncertain what to do next, and projecting an expedition to South America or the Rocky Mountains as soon as he could light upon a companion. His absence, silent and shy though the young man had been, left a perceptible gap; to be with him, Rupert said, was as good as daily bread; it was wholesome and nourishing, although you could not detect a particular flavour in

it. But he could no longer be reckoned a member of that household. Lady May did not mention him. The Earl was equally reticent. Other guests came and went; it was not a lonely place; but among them Rupert saw none to attract him, and he was not disposed to cultivate them from motives of worldly interest. He threw himself into his task, which had been neglected for so many summer days. He was up early and late, dined by himself as often as at the Earl's table, excused his solitude on the plea that he had devoured all his leisure while away, and lived on Hippolyta's letters, which came regularly every morning, forty-eight hours after they were written. For they had to be taken in and re-addressed at his London house.

One person had remained at the Court whom he heartily wished a thousand miles off; but she had apparently her own reasons for staying. I need not say that it was the Countess Lutenieff. In former days she had taken hardly more notice of him than of 'the mechanic,' Ivor Mardol. She now greeted him ostentatiously, came with her light *insouciant* manner into the Great Hall, tripped about on the scaffolding to the imminent risk of her own neck, and was, in short, much in his way. Rupert had not the brusque address of some great artists; he could not be rude to a lady (unless, Hippolyta would have interposed, he happened to be very much in love with her), and he was vexed by the presence and the babble of the Countess without knowing how to

get rid of either. Lady May did not come so often. Her manner, too, was changed. She looked at him as much as ever, but she spoke less; and their confidences on both sides seemed to be at an end. She would stand and watch him painting. If he expressed a wish that anything, however slight, should be altered in his room, or in the hours at which the workmen came or went, though it were a passing fancy and he had not dreamt of its being seriously regarded, still the alteration was made, the wish was carried out. He felt uncomfortable; but with his sense of obligation, which would not rise to gratitude, was mingled a feeling of pity. He was quick enough now to perceive how intense and lasting was the passion which ruled in Lady May. What would happen when she came to know the truth, or, at least, as much of it as the world should ever be acquainted with? She and Hippolyta could never meet again; their paths had crossed once, and once only, then each had gone her way. And he was moving, and should ever move, on the path of Hippolyta. How would the Earl's daughter regard their union, which would of course to her have the semblance of marriage? All depended probably on how it came to her ears. Meanwhile Rupert, wholly delivered from the fancy that she had touched his affection, was so calm, so cold, and so civil, that to one less bent on conquering him the task which May Davenant had undertaken would have seemed desperate. Either he was inaccessible by nature, or the conquest was already made—by another. She did not appear

to think so. She was wary, attentive, engrossed, letting not a hint escape from her, and watching every expression on his countenance, every slightest accident in the day's proceedings. Rupert felt that it was so; it gave him a great deal of occupation and made existence at Trelingham a penalty. He was not likely to be drawn away from Hippolyta by such an Argus-eyed creature. But he wished there were a Hermes to send her to sleep with his magic-wand.

Among other difficulties, one, which naturally presented itself to a lover, was that of visiting Falside, where he wished to consecrate by devout pilgrimage all the haunts of Hippolyta, making his memory identical with hers and taking to himself the past which she had lived without him. Should he go or not go? It was a serious question. At length he resolved to break the ice. The two ladies and he were standing aloft on a broad scaffold, in front of that picture representing Tristram and Iseult, which as a *tableau vivant* had stirred Hippolyta's jealousy. Rupert, touching the burnished gold of the chalice with his brush, and keeping his eyes on the fresco, said casually, 'I think I shall ride to Falside when I have done this piece of the day's work.'

'To Falside?' exclaimed the Countess, looking aside at Lady May. 'Oh, of course, to go on with your landscape, which, by the bye, we have never seen. What a pity it is that such a picturesque little demesne should be left in the charge of a couple of old servants!

It might as well belong to a ghost or a dead man as to Colonel Valence, who is never at home.'

'But Miss Valence takes care of it,' said Rupert, always with his brush in his hand, intent on the shading of the chalice. He kept good control over his voice.

'Dear me!' cried Karina, now looking straight at Lady May and addressing her, 'how odd that Mr. Glanville should not know that Miss Valence has disappeared from Falside!'

'Disappeared!' said the artist boldly. 'What do you mean, Countess? Is that a term of romance for something very ordinary?'

'Ordinary or extraordinary,' she replied, 'it is true. A few days after you went to London—when was it, May?' interrupting herself suddenly.

'When was what?' said Lady May. 'I can't help you to an answer if you break off in the middle of a sentence.' She was blushing, and the plank on which she stood trembled.

Rupert put out his arm to keep her from falling, and drew her from the edge of the scaffold. 'Take care, Lady May,' he said; 'there is always danger of accident when people begin talking up in the air like this. They forget that they are not on the ground.'

'Thank you,' she said in a low voice, coming nearer to the fresco. She was angry at having betrayed her motion. 'Well, Karina,' she said, recovering herself, 'what were you saying?'

'I was telling Mr. Glanville that Miss Valence had quitted Falside unexpectedly about a week after Cousin Tom's birthday; and that she did not inform us, in the brief note we received, either of her destination or of the causes which led to her sudden departure.'

There was a certain ill-natured emphasis in these formal words which amused Rupert. He thought himself quite a match for Madame de Lutenieff. So he laughed and answered, 'I did not know you were so much in Miss Valence's confidence. Has she been in the habit of notifying her movements and their motives to her feminine acquaintance? And has she really gone?'

'We were not mere acquaintance,' retorted Karina: 'you may remember, Sir Artist, how anxious she was to be received at Trelingham. One might have supposed it was the chief object of her life. And no sooner is she free of the house, than she vanishes into space without a word of explanation either to my cousin or to me, although we were both devotedly fond of her.'

'Don't exaggerate, Karina,' said Lady May from her place near Rupert; 'you were as fond of her as you would be of a new plaything for three days and a half; if she had not gone you would have got tired and found another plaything before long. As for me, I never pretended to be enthusiastic about Miss Valence. Her wish to put an end to the misunderstanding between papa and Colonel Valence was no doubt

amiable. But I could not care for a young lady who held her principles.'

'What sort of principles?' inquired Rupert. He did not feel much attracted to Lady May while she was speaking. She to scorn Hippolyta! It was well for both that he knew how to hold his tongue.

'Oh, dangerous principles enough,' she answered. 'I do not know that I can or ought to describe them; but you may imagine that Colonel Valence would not teach his daughter the maxims of English society.'

'Now *you* are exaggerating,' interrupted the Countess; 'they were not English maxims, I grant. But they were romantic. Do you think, Mr. Glanville,' she went on, 'that there is no morality out of England? Miss Valence, my cousin, and I had a famous dispute on that subject before she went. I agreed with Miss Valence, and we were set down by Lady May as exceedingly naughty. Were we not, May?'

'You misrepresent me,' her cousin answered, 'and you are doing injustice to Miss Valence. But I have no particular pleasure in discussing her views, even if I fully understood them. I am not sorry she has left Falside for what may prove a long time. It was a dangerous and difficult connection, as I saw at the beginning. Not indeed,' she hastened to add, 'that any one was to blame, except Colonel Valence for bringing up his daughter on such a system. I am glad we visited her, and glad the acquaintance is probably over.'

'Did Miss Valence write that she should be away a long while?' asked Rupert.

The Countess replied, 'She spoke of leaving Falside and being uncertain whether she should return. It was a short note—two or three lines in haste, that was all.'

'Something connected with her father's plans, perhaps,' said Rupert; 'he is a great traveller.' It was necessary to find out whether the Countess suspected anything.

'And a great conspirator,' said Madame de Lutenieff. 'I should like to know him. What an entertaining history he must have lived through, always plotting and going about in disguise for thirty or forty years, like the villain in a play! But we don't know whether Miss Valence followed him from home. She may have gone off with one of those dark Italians that used to be seen at Falside. We did fancy, just for a moment,' pursued this hare-brained young lady—'but of course it was only a joke—that she was not altogether indifferent to—to——' she stopped and looked across at Lady May. But no help came from that quarter. Rupert felt the blood mounting in his cheeks.

'Go on, Countess,' he said resolutely; 'you don't finish your sentences this morning.' His tone of calm indifference disconcerted Madame de Lutenieff, who could not see his face.

'Oh, it was all nonsense,' she said with less spirit than usual; 'but in the country people have nothing

to do except to invent stories about their friends. When you left the Court, instead of waiting till Cousin Tom's festival was over, and Miss Valence went away in a hurry, I said to Lady May that perhaps it had been arranged when you were dancing at the dress ball. But don't be wrathful, Mr. Glanville,' for he had now turned round with the brush in his hand; 'I am never serious, you know, and I meant no harm.'

'Make your mind easy, Countess,' replied the artist; 'I am not likely to be wrathful over a little bit of romance, if I may apply the word as Lady May did just now. When Miss Valence left the ball to meet her father, I had no more notion that she would be quitting Falside in a week than you had. Less, perhaps. And you cannot guess whither she has gone?'

'Not in the least,' said Karina, somewhat crestfallen. She had not shaken Rupert's equanimity; nor was she further advanced on the subject of his relations to Hippolyta. But there was something else to be attempted, and Lady May's leaving the Great Hall when their conversation reached this point gave her the opportunity she longed for. With that engaging openness which, from being really a part of her character, had been submitted without difficulty to cultivation, and was now a weapon of attack and defence, she contrived to let Rupert know that Tom Davenant had proposed for his cousin's hand, but with the unexpected result which has been already chronicled. 'Unexpected,' went on the innocent Countess, 'for I need not tell you, Mr. Glanville, that Lady May has thereby

surrendered, if I should not rather say forfeited, the most splendid prospect. She would have been Countess of Trelingham; she would have continued to live in the home of her childhood, and to have the control of this great property. But I do not blame her, oh no,' she exclaimed with pathetic fervour; 'I can guess the reason, and I admire the constancy with which she has resisted temptation.' Her eyes, though not capable of a deep expression, were searching the artist through and through.

He answered coolly, 'I suppose the reason is not hard to guess. Lady May did not care sufficiently for her cousin, who, if I am not impertinent in saying so, is one of the noblest young men I have come across.' He was returning good for evil, and the Countess smiled. Praise of her *preux chevalier* always melted her.

'Come,' she said, 'let us be friends, Mr. Glanville. I see you do not bear malice. You are right in supposing that Lady May does not care for my Cousin Tom. Shall I be indiscreet if I tell you that that is only half the reason?' And her eyes gleamed brightly.

'I should be indiscreet, perhaps,' was his answer, partly serious and partly ironical, 'if I allowed one lady to betray the thoughts of another; although they do say that is a way they have.'

'For shame, for shame!' she said. 'I shall tell you nothing now, and yet you are dying to hear.' She waited, but he would give her no encouragement.

'I am dying to finish my morning's work,' at last he said. It was hardly courteous, but why would she

linger there? He went resolutely at his fresco again.

The Countess thought a little while before setting her foot on the ladder by which she had come up; and then, with a mischievous smile, said to him, 'I see all your ambition lies in your art. It is very natural, as I can testify, being a sort of artist myself. But should it ever take another direction, not quite so lofty, and yet loftier, come to me for information.' With which enigmatic sentence she descended to the floor of the Hall and went out.

Glanville, I am sorry to say, was anything but grateful; and his comments, delivered under his breath as he went on painting, would have astonished Madame de Lutenieff. For, though dissatisfied with her partial success, she had the witness of a good conscience, and would not have minded explaining to a female confidante the line of conduct she had pursued. There was only one rival in Mr. Tom Davenant's affections whom she feared, and that was Lady May. So long as his cousin remained single, Tom was capable of renewing his offer. Were she married, or engaged, and out of the way, Karina trusted that the young man would have eyes for her own attractions, which were not inconsiderable. She had almost convinced herself that Lady May was in love with the artist; that passionate scene in which Hippolyta had said so little and Lady May had been so vehement was ever present to her fancy; and in the hope of a further unravelling of the

threads she, instead of following Mrs. Davenant and her son to London, had waited for Rupert's return. It was all important that he should know the offer had been made and rejected. She would help him to one of the most accomplished and stately of brides. It was of no consequence that Lady May would have to stoop a little in order to marry him, but of the utmost that he should understand she was there, waiting for him to fall on one knee and demand her hand. The Earl would not refuse, and the great danger would be averted. So the Countess reasoned, not foolishly from her point of view. It was a misfortune that Rupert would not accept her confidence, and that Lady May would endure no reference, on her part, to Rupert. How absurdly stiff and straitlaced was the morality of English people! Even that daring Miss Valence had shown extreme reserve in their last interview at Falside, and was now departed on an errand which might have some romance in it, but would be sure after all to end, as English stories did, with perfect propriety. Karina sighed; she was not made for this dull realm. She hoped, when the time came, she should persuade Tom to live abroad; not so much at Paris—Paris was not itself under the Third Republic—but at Vienna, Venice, Naples, with an interval once in a way at Monte Carlo. The Countess did not play, but she took great pleasure in looking on while others played.

The development of the drama which she desired

to see at Trelingham was, however, interrupted a few days later. The Earl, never very strong, had been ailing for some time, and his physicians, after consultation, ordered him to take the waters at Schwalbach. He was unwilling to go, but they threatened him with the consequences; and Lady May, who was really and devotedly attached to her father, added her persuasion. She would of course accompany him. The Countess thought she might join them later on; and, as Glanville declared that he fully entered into Lord Trelingham's mind on the subject of the decorations, and would write frequently and give ample details of the progress of the work, it was decided that a move should be made. Thus the artist and Mr. Truscombe would be lords of the domain during his absence; but on Glanville's suggesting that he must occasionally quit the Court for other engagements, Lord Trelingham begged him to use all the freedom he might wish. It had been stipulated at the beginning that Rupert should take a fair time over the work and not hurry. When, therefore, he had been some three weeks at the Court, and his impatience to see Hippolyta again was reaching a feverish height, they all, to his infinite content, bade him farewell one fine morning. That afternoon he rode to Falside, and, winning admittance to the library, wrote thence a glowing epistle to Mrs. Malcolm, in which he rejoiced over his new-found liberty, and promised to be at Forrest House within the week.

He kept his word. Three days of unalloyed happiness passed like a flash of summer-lightning, lambent, swift, and beautiful. It seemed to Rupert that Hippolyta had subdued her melancholy. She was adorably candid and child-like, full of pretty fancies and loving conceits, reluctant to let him go, yet comforted with the hope of their union for good and all when the next few months were over. She had found occupation in gardening, and her list of the neighbouring poor was beginning to fill. Had she gone near an infected house, or exposed herself to danger? No, she answered laughingly; there was no infection within three miles. She had attended one sick-bed, and meant to attend it still, for it had gained her a pleasant intimacy. Further the story did not go. Rupert, too much in love with Hippolyta to hear all she said, hardly waited for the end of the sentence, but was bursting out, in the manner of happy mortals, with praises of her generosity and declarations of his unalterable affection. He went back to Trelingham more in love than ever; and if he did not yield to home-sickness now, it was by dint of incessant occupation.

The story which he would not let Hippolyta finish was pretty in its way. At Falside she had taken pleasure in her garden, and with help from Andres—who loved her as if he had been her mastiff, and took more care of her than she knew—the flower-beds had flourished gaily, and the wilderness above and below the cascade had blossomed like the rose.

It was only to be expected that she should turn to the flowers again for consolation when Rupert went away. There was much to be done in the garden of Forrest House, for it had been neglected somewhat since Miss Foljambe's death. But the more there was to do the more Hippolyta was pleased; and every morning saw her in a costume that the work would not spoil, and in gardening gloves, engaged in weeding and trimming borders, and bringing back the straggling plants into some sort of order. The variety of flowers was unusual, and among them were lilies of all kinds, with many old-fashioned bulbs, tulips and hyacinths, which had been preserved in the greenhouse with more care than the rest. Hippolyta wanted no help; but, for the rougher tasks, she might obtain it from the man who looked after the stables—a kind of miscellaneous groom and ostler, who did not sleep on the premises.

She was alone in the garden, then, one pleasant forenoon, binding up some long creepers which had trailed over a bed of calceolarias, when the housekeeper, good Mrs. Leeming, came to her with a request. Might the gardener next door speak to her? 'Next door?' inquired Hippolyta; 'do you mean at the church?' Mrs. Leeming meant at the church, if it was giving no offence. 'None in the world,' said her mistress; 'why should it?' Well, the housekeeper did not know, but some people were set against Roman Catholics. Not Miss Foljambe, to be sure; that charitable lady had a kind word for

all the world. And that was why the gardener came. 'Let him come now, then,' said Mrs. Malcolm, who had not learnt to tolerate servants' long stories. The housekeeper beckoned to a man that, during their short colloquy, had been standing at the gate. He came forward and took off his hat respectfully. He was a fine-looking man of about forty, tall and well made, with a clear glance in his gray eyes, and a good address. The housekeeper said, 'Now, Mr. Dauris, tell Mrs. Malcolm what you want,' which introduction over, she discreetly retired.

Mr. Dauris, thus encouraged, and still more by the expression on Hippolyta's countenance, which was invariably gentle and sympathetic when she came across any of her own class, as she called them, said that he had made bold to come, now Forrest House was let, to beg for some flowers to decorate the altars in St. Cyprian's, of which he was gardener and sacristan. 'But,' he added, 'there is not much of a garden, only narrow strips on the other side of the building, and in a shady corner down by the lane where hardly anything will grow.' He spoke perfectly correct English, without accent either provincial or of Bow Bells, and was indeed one of the many working men that know their native tongue, and are proud of it.

Two sentences were enough to interest Hippolyta. 'You would like me to give you some flowers for your church? I will, with pleasure,' she answered; 'but the garden is in a rather backward condition.

Look round and tell me what will suit you best.' He thanked her; and as she walked to the greenhouse, with Mr. Dauris a little way behind, she considered whether he could not tell her something of the neighbourhood and the sick poor whom she was minded to take in charge. She put the question to him.

'Yes, indeed,' he answered, 'I know most of the poor about here. But it is not exactly a poverty-stricken place. On this side, along the Hill, you will not find any. You must cross the market and go down into the small streets beyond it, which are beginning to be crowded worse than I remember them. Our own people live there mostly. But it doesn't matter which door you open; you will find suffering and sin inside. The fathers at St. Cyprian's are there day and night; and I often hear them say that they can do no good. I don't wonder at it, seeing how the people are compelled to live.'

'No, nor do I,' said Hippolyta sorrowfully. And she was abiding within these golden gates, with every luxury at command, a garden and a palace to afford her pleasure at all hours, and neither care nor trouble! How were these things to be reconciled? She must not dwell on them. It could do no good just then.

'What made you come to me for flowers?' she asked, by way of turning the conversation, while she cut the best she could find.

Mr. Dauris, taking with a smile the bunch she

held out to him, answered, 'I thought you might be like Miss Foljambe, who was very good to us and sent in flowers every Saturday for the Lady altar. She was not a Catholic; but she used to say that flowers were of God's religion, and could do nothing but good to anybody.'

'She was very right,' exclaimed Hippolyta, pleased with this saying of the lady in whose shadow she dwelt all day. It was like making her acquaintance, though dead. 'She was very right, indeed. A Spanish poet says, "Flowers are the thoughts of everlasting love." I will send you some for the Lady altar every Saturday; and lest I should forget, will you come to me next Saturday morning?'

'I shall be much pleased to do so,' replied the gardener, going away. 'But I beg your pardon,' he resumed, in a less cheerful tone, 'next Saturday I must take my poor wife, if she is well enough, to the infirmary'—he named one at a distance—'where the doctors have promised to see what they can do for her.'

'Is your wife very ill, then?' inquired Hippolyta. 'You did not mention her when I was asking you about the sick in the neighbourhood.'

'She has been ill this long while,' he said; 'but we are not in want, thank God. I earn a good income as a gardener—not here at St. Cyprian's,' he continued smiling, 'the fathers could not afford it; but a few doors down when you pass Church Lane. Our cottage is at the end of the lane.'

'But I should like very much to be of service to your wife, if I could,' said Hippolyta eagerly. 'What is the matter with her?'

'We call it a weak chest; but I am afraid it is more serious. The doctor tells me—however, I keep it from my wife, so please don't mention it, for fear it should frighten her—that one lung is quite gone and the other affected. She is obliged to lie down a good deal with pains in her head and back.'

'Poor thing, poor thing,' exclaimed Hippolyta; 'how sad for you both! Have you any children?'

'Two little boys,' he answered, 'and a girl. Annie is grown up, she is seventeen.'

'And is she at home? She ought to be a good help to her mother.'

'She is generally at home,' was the reply. 'She has been in service, but we did not like it for her. It was in a lady's house near Dorset Square.' The tone in which he spoke implied some dissatisfaction, either with Annie or with domestic service in general.

'Well, I am glad you have told me,' said Hippolyta; 'and do you think Mrs. Dauris would like me to come and see her?'

'Surely she would, if you were so kind; and I should like it too. But we are not in want of anything, thank God,' he repeated, 'and we would not take your time from those that are.'

'Oh, I will find time,' she answered cheerfully; 'may I come this afternoon, or will it be too soon? I could come to-morrow, in that case.'

'I will tell my wife at dinner-time,' he said, 'and you will be welcome at any hour. In the afternoon she does not suffer so much from headache.'

It was arranged accordingly. The gardener took his flowers and withdrew; and Hippolyta, roused at the anticipation of having an object for her benevolence, went on weeding and pruning with great animation. She did not know how tired she had been all this while of living like the sleeping beauty in the wood, alone in Elfland, with nothing to do, and her prince travelling in the distance or painting pictures at Trelingham Court. She ate her luncheon with more appetite, and counted the minutes till it was time for walking out. Mr. Dauris had told her how to find the cottage. It was less than a quarter of a mile from Forrest House, at the end of the rambling lane which led by the side of St. Cyprian's, and past detached dwellings with large gardens between them, into the more open country. Rupert and Hippolyta had driven that way once, but she had not observed the gardener's little house, although it might have drawn the attention of a lover of flowers, for it was embowered in honeysuckle and clematis.

She did not go there direct, but wandered about the countrified paths, under the shade of the great trees which made all that neighbourhood pleasant. Her thoughts were not sombre, as they had been. The conviction of fearless innocence, which in other days had allowed her to roam unattended, with

Fancy for her sole companion, was strong within her. It was early in the afternoon, and the sun and the flowers were equally brilliant, when she stopped at the cottage-gate. She saw in front of her a two-storied house, standing back from the gravel pathway, on the edge of a triangular piece of turf which represented, no doubt, a more extensive village-green, now discommoned and taken in by the private dwellings scattered around. In front of Mr. Dauris's cottage were garden-beds, abounding in well-assorted hues, and, as was evident, carefully tended. The little porch in the middle was overrun with clematis; and when Hippolyta arrived the door stood open, giving a view of the passage beyond, with its strip of cocoa-nut matting. The green palings matched the green shutters, made like Venetian blinds, which adorned the windows on either side of the porch. It seemed a little nest of happiness, bright and warm, sunshine without and comfort within. 'There is sickness within, too,' said the compassionate Hippolyta, as she lifted the latch and went up the bit of walk which led to the front door. While she stood there, looking for bell or knocker, a little boy came running round the corner of the house from the garden behind. He was out of breath, and stopped when he saw the lady, a stranger to him. What a pretty boy he looked! The fairest of fair hair, hanging about his shoulders in ringlets, large laughing gray eyes, a face ruddy and white with pouting rosy lips, and his little frame panting with innocent life which mantled in

blushes on his cheeks. He seemed between five and six, a sturdy boy, wearing his sailor's dress of dark blue with the pride which attends new clothes in children. After standing still and looking for a moment, he came up confidently. 'Do you want mother?' he inquired, 'because she is in that room,' pointing across to the open window on the other side of the porch. Hippolyta was very fond of children. She smiled and held out her hand, into which he put his own with great docility.

'I daresay it is your mother I want,' she answered, 'but first tell me who you are?'

'I am Willie,' he said. Children seldom give you the whole of their name at once.

'Willie what?' asked the strange lady.

'Willie Dauris,' he answered, with an impatient shake of his curls. 'Come in and see mother. You want mother.' He was very clear on that point, and evidently looked on a cross-examination of himself as time wasted. Hippolyta laughed, and still keeping hold of Willie's hand, knocked at the door on her right. A low voice answered 'Come in,' and Willie pushing open the door, Hippolyta followed.

The little boy, acting as master of the ceremonies, ran across the room where some one was lying on a large and comfortable-looking couch, propped up with pillows. 'The lady wants to see you, mother,' he said, beginning to climb on the couch. His mother motioned him to be still, and holding him with a thin white hand, turned her head towards Hippolyta,

and said in a low but very taking voice, 'Are you Mrs. Malcolm?'

Hippolyta started at the sound of the name. She answered falteringly, 'I—I told Mr. Dauris this morning that I should like to come and see you. He mentioned that you were not well. Did he say I was coming?'

'Yes,' replied the invalid; 'he told me you would be so kind. You are very welcome, very welcome indeed. Willie, get Mrs. Malcolm a chair, and put it here,' pointing to a place near the couch. 'I lose my voice almost,' she went on, 'when the pain keeps on, and my hearing too. Did you ring?'

'No,' said Hippolyta; 'I was on the point of ringing when your boy—when Willie came. He tells me his name is Willie.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Dauris; 'he is called after his father. He is our youngest. He will be six on the Assumption. A beautiful birthday for him, isn't it?'

Hippolyta was puzzled by the expression till she had thought a little. 'Oh,' she said, 'the Assumption of the Virgin, a festival of your religion. Yes, I suppose you would like that. And are you feeling better this afternoon? Your voice is quite clear and distinct.'

'A little better,' answered Mrs. Dauris. 'I hope to be so on Saturday and to go with my husband to the infirmary. It is a long way, but he can borrow a conveyance, he thinks.'

Hippolyta, delighted with the opportunity, offered

her little carriage and insisted with affectionate firmness on its acceptance. She was already pleased with Mrs. Dauris, even as she had been with her husband. The light which fell upon the couch from the open window showed the invalid to be a woman of uncommon beauty, with delicate regular features, flushing when she spoke or looked at her visitor. She seemed tall and slender, so far as could be judged from her reclining position, for, as she explained to Hippolyta, she was unable to rise, much less to do any household work, that afternoon. 'The dinner things,' she said, 'are lying on the table waiting for Annie to clear them away. It is a great trial to me, for I was an active young woman, and I never thought to have suffered from this complaint. It is not in my father's or mother's family. But God's will be done.'

'I saw Annie,' said the little boy, with the brevity of his age.

His mother looked at him uneasily. 'Where did you see her, my darling?' she inquired.

'I don't know,' he said slowly, as if there was nothing more to be added. And then, after being silent for a minute or two, he chanted again in his pretty recitative, 'I saw Annie in the lane. She was talking to a gentleman. She cried. She said I was to go in. But I stayed in the garden.'

Mrs. Dauris looked agitated. Her hands trembled, and she said, 'That will do, my dear. Next time your sister tells you to come in, you must be obedient.'

Willie crept close to his mother. 'Have I been

naughty?' he asked. 'What makes me naughty, mother?' The tears stood in her eyes, and Hippolyta could not help pitying her. She felt there was some sad story behind; and though not wishing to indulge curiosity, she would have given much to express the compassion that rose in her heart. An inspiration came to her. With the engaging smile which so often hovered about her lips, a mixture of kindliness and pity, she drew near to Mrs. Dauris, and said:

'I fear I am taking a great liberty, but if you do not mind, since your daughter is not here just now, I should be so glad to do anything you want. Let me put the room straight for you.'

'Oh no, you must not do that,' said Mrs. Dauris, eyeing her visitor with a good deal of astonishment, but with affection also. 'You are a lady, and it is not fit work for you.'

Hippolyta was quite at home in this sort of encounter. 'Never mind if I am a lady,' she replied; 'I have not lost the use of my hands. I can assure you that I am an adept in washing dishes.' And without more ado, in spite of the earnest and good-natured remonstrances of Mrs. Dauris, she laid aside her cloak, drew hot and cold water with the aid of Willie, who pointed out where everything was, but dispensed as far as possible with speaking, and was soon busy in remedying the disorder she had found on her arrival. It was not a difficult task, and she enjoyed it thoroughly. When all was done she insisted that

the invalid should now try to eat something. There was no resisting her; and the poor consumptive patient made a better meal than she had done for a long while. When it was over they talked a little, and Hippolyta hoped that Annie might come in. But there was no sign of her, and she rose to go. Mrs. Dauris clasped her hand with fervent gratitude; Willie clung to her skirts, and was undecided whether to stay with his mother and cry, or to follow the lady to her unknown abode. She kissed the child, made Mrs. Dauris promise again to avail herself of the carriage, and went home in that healthy state of mind which is the consequence of any little effort done with simple intent, to be of service to another. About Annie, the girl of seventeen, whom her brother had seen talking to a gentleman and crying, she was, it must be admitted, curious. But her curiosity was in no sense equal to her sympathy.

Thus began an acquaintance which ripened ere long into friendship on both sides. Mr. Dauris, when informed by his wife of the circumstances of Hippolyta's visit, was at first indignant that she should have been allowed to stoop so low in her great kindness, and ended by conceiving towards her an enthusiastic respect which bordered on veneration. She was so young, so beautiful, and so unaffectedly gracious; she had such a delicate regard for their privacy, and was so timid in making advances, that in his own mind he did not know whether to call her an angel disguised in weeds of flesh, or a modest maiden whose ignor-

ance concealed from her the humility of her behaviour. She seemed neither humble nor proud; all she did was with her a matter of course. She asked his opinion about other things than flowers, played with Willie and Charlie,—the elder boy, who had been at school on the occasion of her first visit,—sat for many hours by the side of the invalid, and ministered even more effectually to her sympathies than to her bodily wants. Hippolyta was soon recognised as a frequent and favoured visitor. When her hand was on the latch out came the boys, running to greet her, but making as little noise as they could, not to disturb their mother. In the evening she would sit with husband and wife instead of spending the hours after dinner in her solitary room; and she heard many a good word from the lips of both. She loved and admired their simple goodness. They made no inquiries either as to her religious beliefs or her story; they did not even mention Mr. Malcolm's name. This was not due to suspicion; it was native delicacy. The young lady did not speak of her husband, and they would not make so free as to begin.

CHAPTER XXV

NEC DIVERSA TAMEN, QUALEM DECET ESSE SORORUM

SOME time elapsed before she came across Annie Dauris. But when she was passing down Church Lane in the dusk one evening, on her way to the cottage, she observed a tall young man standing close to the hedge where a wide-spreading beech almost hid him from view, and near him on the farther side a girl whose shawl was drawn half over her face, but the accent of whose voice, though Hippolyta could make out nothing of what she said, was unmistakably like Mrs. Dauris's. The young man was not of the working-class. He was well dressed and had a supercilious air; while Annie Dauris, if she it was, clung to his arm with what appeared to be the vehemence of affection or exasperation. He heard her with impatience; flung away her hand, turned to go, but, seeing Hippolyta coming along at a little distance, went back to where he had left his companion. Both of them waited, loitering in the shade with faces

averted till Hippolyta had passed by. It was not difficult to guess that they had been quarrelling, and were ashamed to be seen. Annie Dauris was never at home when Hippolyta called, and it was unlikely that she should have recognised in a casual figure passing down the lane one of whose face she could have no knowledge.

Hippolyta found the gardener and his wife sitting by the open window enjoying the evening air, which was warm and genial. It was one of Mrs. Dauris's good days, when she felt free from headache and could do the light work of the house. Charlie, a bright, fair-haired boy of eleven, was learning his lessons in the garden, sometimes coming up to the window to show what he had done to his father, and at other times dropping his book and looking out dreamily on the darkening sky, his imagination full of those strange fresh thoughts and fancies which are seldom written in our too elderly volumes for children. Willie had been put to bed. There was a great stillness in the air, and it had a soothing influence on them as they sat talking in low tones. While they were thus engaged the door opened, and some one came in. Mrs. Dauris looked up. 'Oh, it is you, Annie,' she said. 'We are very dark here. Will you bring the lamp?' Annie, without speaking a word, went out again and returned in a few moments with the light, which she set down upon a table, and then stationed herself at some distance from Hippolyta, in such a position that she could examine the visitor's

face at her leisure. When she recognised the stranger that had passed along the lane an hour since, she blushed crimson and turned her head away. She bore a striking resemblance to her mother,—the same delicate and regular features, the same bright eyes, the same slender make and upright figure. But the general expression of her countenance was by no means the same. It was ill-tempered and passionate; there was an obstinate look about the mouth; and, for the first time in her life, Hippolyta found herself applying the word 'brazen' to a woman's forehead. She could not have told the reason; was it the swelling surface above the eyebrows which made an impression as of sullen obstinacy and want of shame? But Annie was blushing now; she appeared to be feeling confusion as well as surprise. Mr. Dauris, who had not stirred at her entrance, moved his chair round, and said, 'Annie, come and pay your respects, like a good girl, to Mrs. Malcolm, who has taken such care of your mother.' Annie seemed uncertain whether she would obey or not, but with deliberate slowness she got up from where she was sitting and came forward. Hippolyta held out her hand. She felt for the girl. Annie returned her glance suspiciously, but did not refuse the offered greeting. 'You have never seen my daughter before,' said Mrs. Dauris, 'but I daresay you would have known her in the street if you had. William says she is so like me when we first married.' There was much affection in the mother's voice; not anger or coldness, which,

under the circumstances, might have seemed more natural. Hippolyta did not know what to reply. But with as much gentleness as she could command, she answered, 'No, I never saw your daughter till this evening. But you are right in saying I should recognise the likeness. I did so at once when I was on my way hither, and Annie was walking outside.'

The girl looked frightened, and did not speak one word, waiting for the end of Mrs. Malcolm's revelations. What might have been the consequence had Hippolyta gone on with her story it is impossible to say. She judged it, however, expedient not to add anything. They knew their daughter's habits, as was evident from Willie's exclamations on the day of her first visit; neither did it become her to cast a slur upon conduct which, even if it had no justification, in some particulars might resemble her own. She contented herself with putting a question or two, while Annie kept a determined silence, on the kind of service in which she had lived and her special accomplishments. Annie told her at last that she was fond of dressmaking and wanted to go back, not to Dorset Square, but to a shop near Oxford Street, where she had been admitted to the sight of fashionable robe-making when about fifteen. From that establishment, as Hippolyta learned by and by, her father had removed her, and she had then gone into domestic service. 'If all you want is to learn dressmaking,' said Mrs. Malcolm, 'I can give you some instruction myself, and you would be able to take care of your

mother at the same time. Would you like to come and see me at Forrest House? I have leisure on one or two days a week. What do you think, Mrs. Dauris? Do you approve?' Husband and wife were perfectly willing; but Mr. Dauris subjoined, 'Annie must say her own word in the matter, or she may think we are forcing her. Now, my girl, which would you prefer—to go with Mrs. Malcolm, or to stay at home as you have been doing?' She did not give a direct answer, but said, as if it was the same thing, 'I should like to learn dressmaking.' And Hippolyta thought it best to leave the matter so. In her own mind she said that Annie would be none the worse for learning, as she certainly should if she came to Forrest House, that her present attire was showy and not at all in good taste. Mrs. Dauris always looked neat and simple in her cotton gown; but her daughter assumed a tawdry style, which would have been expensive, could she have afforded it, and heightened her bold, shameless air. Had she not been so pretty, the whole appearance of the child, for she was nothing else, would have been exceedingly painful. She was like a tainted flower. Where had she gained that early acquaintance with vice and finery? Not at home, as was evident. Perhaps there was yet a chance of teaching her better things. Intractable and sullen though she was, a little incident which happened when Hippolyta was going showed that her feelings were not wholly perverted. 'Good-night' had been said on both sides, and their visitor was passing

through the gate, when she heard a step behind her, and turning saw Annie, who had followed unperceived. 'Well, my dear?' said Mrs. Malcolm kindly. Annie laid a furtive hand upon her dress, much in the fashion of a child who wants to whisper something, and said with a downcast look, 'Will you let me come to-morrow for the dressmaking, in the afternoon?' Hippolyta assured her of a hearty welcome; and the girl went on, forcing the words, which did not seem to flow easily from her lips. 'I like you; it was good of you not to tell my father what you saw, and not to ask me about it.' And when she had said this she let go Hippolyta's dress, and went in again without waiting for an answer.

She did come next day; but some time elapsed before Hippolyta could win her confidence. It was during this interval that Rupert returned. While he stayed there was no time to instruct Annie or to call at the cottage. She did not mention the story to Rupert again; they had their own romance to talk over, and the possibilities of the future to forecast. And so it continued. Whenever, consistently with his engagements, the artist could run up to London for a few days, he would spend an hour or two at his own house, arranging papers and seeing those who would have been surprised or offended were he to overlook their claims; but no sooner were these formalities complied with than he vanished into space, and Hippolyta had him to herself at Forrest House. They were wonderfully happy.

Meanwhile her interest in the gardener's family continued. The boys, not altogether with Mrs. Leeming's goodwill, were allowed to play about the grounds of the red brick mansion, where no child had been since Glanville himself had paid those dreary visits to Miss Atterbury which he was glad not to remember. But Willie and Charlie, though they could not help doing mischief in their primeval innocence, were very amusing, affectionate, and original, helping Hippolyta with the flowers, wheeling barrows of earth or dead leaves, which they occasionally overset on the pathway to their own extreme delight, and making believe that they were elves in enchanted places, or young princes in search of adventures under the trees of the forest into which they transformed the garden to give themselves larger scope. They were great favourites with Mrs. Malcolm, whom they worshipped and followed everywhere. But being shy and well brought up, they did not presume on her favour; and if she told them there was a border they must not dig up, or a room they were not to enter, Charlie not only observed the command himself, but took especial care that Willie, who was younger and more volatile, should not forget it. 'Mrs. Malcolm said not,' was their law of the Medes and Persians which might not be altered. On Saturdays they carried between them the flowers which Hippolyta destined for the church, to their father. It was part of their play to repeat, with childish treble pipe and most naïve turns of speech, the legends of

the Catholic saints which they had been taught at school; and their kind protectress, whose presence did not terrify them nor check their harmless babble, listened with more pleasure than she could have supposed to their fantastic stories. But they were instinct with a life and colour which for the moment gave them something like the air of reality. It was like viewing the painted windows from the inside, where the legend came out plain and the figures seemed more human. Both the boys would be story-tellers in turn; and Willie's slow but vivid imagination, which wrought confusion in the history, made him one of the most lovable and laughable of little creatures. Charlie, however, had more feeling. He returned Mrs. Malcolm's affection ardently, and though he was too big at eleven to be hanging on a lady's skirts, as Willie often did, you might be sure that, if Hippolyta were within reach, he would not be far off. Did she leave her hat, or cloak, or gloves on the table, he liked to steal up when he thought no one was looking and to touch them fondly. One thing surprised the religious boy, for such he was, why Mrs. Malcolm never went to St. Cyprian's like his father—and his mother when she was well. On a certain Saturday, when she had made up the flowers into bouquets and put them into the children's hands, as they were going Charlie stopped and, fixing his beautiful eyes on Hippolyta, said to her, 'Won't you come and see them on the altar? They look prettiest there, and they smell so sweet in church.'

'No, darling,' said Hippolyta with a slight feeling of sadness, 'not now, I am busy. Some other time, perhaps.' The boys ran off; but she repeated mechanically to herself, 'Some other time, some other time! Ought I to have said that? I shall not go to see the flowers on the altar, let them look ever so pretty.'

Their sister was quite different. She did not enter St. Cyprian's either; she seemed to have little or none of the religious instinct; and when Willie and Charlie ran and jumped in the garden, she did not join them. Hippolyta was almost too considerate towards the girl, letting her spend long afternoons in the house, and showing her everything that she thought would interest her. Annie had never seen such treasures before; they took hold of her fancy mightily, and she was eager to learn the objects and uses of the multiplied curiosities in which the old mansion abounded. She gave careful attention to every word that fell from Hippolyta in illustration of the pictures, china, and the ten thousand knick-knacks which were necessarily not to be comprehended without a gloss by the gardener's daughter. She studied Mrs. Malcolm's way of speaking, and expended thought not only on the patterns of dress which were given her to cut out, but likewise on those which were worn by her teacher. Not without a sense of amusement, though with keener feelings of compassion, did Hippolyta observe that she seemed to be going over in her mind a part to be hereafter acted; to be

rehearsing, as it were, the manners and mode of speech that characterised 'a lady.' She was equally bold in imitation and timid in putting questions; but there was evidently a multitude of things belonging to this novel sphere that she thirsted to inquire about. Hippolyta, seeming not to mind, let her have her way. Annie began to talk more freely, to give expression to some of her less dangerous inclinations. She was not exactly ignorant or dull, but the first steps in mounting from one's native regions are the most difficult, and she dreaded to set Mrs. Malcolm against her. Little by little, however, the nature of the girl discovered itself.

There was nothing uncommon, except her lovely features, and they were half spoilt by her sullen look, in Annie Dauris. Between her and thousands of other London-bred girls there reigned an unmistakable family likeness; but Hippolyta, in spite of her reading and travels, did not know it, and this, the first specimen she had seen, filled her with dislike and amazement. Mr. Dauris sent his boys to the school which was carried on by the fathers at St. Cyprian's, and his girl to the convent. But there was another school which he could not prevent them from frequenting if they chose—that of the children who played with them, and of the London streets. Annie —but I think Mrs. Dauris can begin the story better than I. She had lived through it all. Sitting up on her couch, and pausing from time to time when her breath failed her, she unburdened herself of this great

trouble to the young married lady one morning, when Annie was ironing in the little back-kitchen and not likely to interrupt them.

'It shames me,' she said, 'to speak about such things in the hearing of a lady like you; but Annie is not the child she was, and you ought to know her ways. I don't know what came over her when she got to be a big girl. She was as good a child as you would wish to see, and the sisters were very fond of her, till she was twelve or thirteen. And then she took up with some of the bad characters in the school, and she was always going about with them at night instead of coming home, staying in the street, and staring into public-houses, and seeing what it was not right for her to see. I spoke to her often enough, God knows, but as soon as my back was turned away she would go, and not be home again till midnight perhaps, or later. I was afraid William would notice it; for, though he is a peaceable, religious man, as you may see, he can be very angry, and once he gives way to his feeling I am afraid of what will happen. He did go after her once, and she was obstinate and would not come in; it was when they were holding a fair in the market,—she said no, she had rather stay out all night; and William took her and brought her home, and that time he beat her severely. Oh, dear me, I shall never, never forget it. And it did no good; she was worse than ever. Many an hour I spent in search of her during the dark winter nights, when she would slip out and run

off to her bad companions. And where did I find her, after all? Standing at the bar of a gin palace, talking and laughing with grown men, or coming out of one of the low theatres in the neighbourhood. When she saw me she ran away or hid round a corner, and I have had to come home through rain and snow without Annie. My husband told me it was madness, that I should only kill myself; but I had the feelings of a mother, and I could not see my child lost. It is a wonder that she never got into worse mischief, for the men and the women she made friends of were thieves, and well known to the police. I cannot tell where she found a shelter the nights she stayed out. She would never say, and she seemed not to care. One night she would have spent in the station-house, for she was taken there with others that had been drinking and fighting; but the sergeant knew my husband, and instead of taking down the charge, he sent round, like a good man, for William, and her father brought her home. That struck a wholesome fear into her during a week or two; and then she went away again. We were at our wits' end what to do with her. Isn't it a pitiful tale, Mrs. Malcolm?' she said, turning with wet eyes to Hippolyta, whose silence had deepened with her sympathy and horror. She could not speak, but she pressed the poor mother's hand. There was a painful pause.

'I don't believe,' resumed Mrs. Dauris, when she recovered her breath, 'that there was malice in Annie. She was young and curious; she had no

sense of danger, and of course she liked to see what was going on. That is how we poor people lose our children. They go into the streets and the flood carries them away. We are not the only ones in this neighbourhood that have had trouble with a daughter and shed scalding tears over her ruin. Though, I thank God, Annie is not ruined yet. She has lost her character with the sisters, and the people about think she has behaved like the rest of her bad companions. But, Mrs. Malcolm, it is not true. I give you the word of a mother that there is not a word of truth in it. Annie will not be said or led by her father, more is the pity; and when he is at home she will not open her mouth, as you saw the other night. The poor child is afraid of him since he beat her, and she is stiff-necked too, and no one can manage her. I do sometimes coax her to talk, and then she tells me things. William doesn't know that Maurice Regan has been near the cottage, and I would not have him know. But Annie confessed it when I repeated what her brother said about a gentleman in the lane.'

'Oh, indeed,' exclaimed Hippolyta; 'then Maurice Regan is the gentleman's name. *Is* he a gentleman?'

Yes, he was a gentleman, and he had seen Annie walking home to her Cousin Harriet's from Mark Tomlinson the draper's near Oxford Street; and he had fallen desperately in love with her. It was the most ordinary of 'London idylls'—gutter-idylls, one

should call them perhaps. While Mrs. Dauris went on with the shameful story Hippolyta seemed to hear it all in a dream. The great workroom, with its rows of workers; the elder girl, Charlotte Fraser, who had 'taken a fancy to Annie,' and showed her fine sights, leading her to music halls, where there was comic singing, with plenty to eat and drink, and nothing for Annie to pay; the well-dressed gentleman that was a friend of Charlotte's, and gave her up to walk with the younger girl he met in her company; the first fit of intoxication, when the mother, going after Annie, saw her with eyes 'at first full of wild fire, and then as full of sleep and stupidity'; and the second and the third fit, when a stranger passing along noticed the child of fifteen lying outside the tavern insensible, with a crowd standing about her; the midnight scenes, when her father and mother went searching over London for their lost daughter; the flights from home, the recaptures, the hopeless efforts on the part of this good lady and that to bring her to a better mind; and at last, the trembling fear of the poor mother, declining every day to her grave, but dreading that Annie would break away from home once more and cast herself upon the London streets; —it was a horrible chapter of existence, more like nightmare than reality.

But it was also, for Hippolyta Valence, like holding up a blurred and crooked mirror to her own countenance. The distorted features came back, her own and not her own, as if she beheld them under the

oppression of delirium. Why should the sentiment of guilt or shame stir within her bosom, at the thought of Annie Dauris's unmaidenly history? There existed no kinship, how remote soever, between them. But the caricature of love was hideously grotesque; its surroundings were so vile and mean. The streets with their flaring, murky lamps; the horrible, glittering gin palaces; the throng of men and women in rags or in flaunting colours that were ever in motion, in and out through the half-open doors; the rainy nights, when mud was lying thick in the gutters and the spouts were running with foul water, and along the dark and noisome pathways went to and fro the miscellaneous company of women with their draggled garments and shameless, miserable, wrinkled faces, while their partners in vice reeled along, drunken and riotous, in the full tide of debauch,—all this, which came before her suddenly like a stage built up and illuminated from end to end in the depth of darkness, was it indeed the realisation of that dream of free love wherein she had delighted as in a thing most beautiful and tender? Was this the breathing out of pure affection, the blending of heart with heart, the springing up of amaranthine flowers from our mortal mould? At a glance she seemed to take in the existence of such a girl as Annie Dauris,—the withering of its innocence and beauty, the stubborn rage, and unfulfilled desire, and ever-renewed thirst for what was forbidden. 'Oh, horrible, horrible,' she said beneath her breath. It made her sick and faint to think of it.

Mrs. Dauris had not finished speaking when 'Hush!' said Hippolyta, 'I hear a noise this way. 'Isn't Annie coming from the back-kitchen?' They stopped to listen, and the girl entered, with a number of her favourite weekly novelette in her hand.

'I have done ironing,' she said. 'Will you let me sit here? it is so hot near the ironing-stove.' Her face was flushed with the heat, but she looked less ill-tempered than usual. She was certainly pretty, with a sweet expression, something like her brother Charlie's, just then.

'What are you reading?' said Hippolyta; 'may I look?' She surrendered her novelette doubtingly. It was not badly printed, but rejoiced in illustrations of a most pronounced crudeness and vulgarity, which appeared on the reverse of the thin paper; and its title was—but there is no reason why the title, though merely high-sounding and silly, should be advertised here. It used to glare from London hoardings in great red and green letters, for the delectation of the passing multitude not so many years ago, although it is now rarely to be met with—at least that is my experience—even in catalogues of second-hand rubbish. About a hundred and four numbers compose this sort of tale, which affects the dramatic suddenness and mysterious endings of Eugène Sue, dashed with the sentiment of Mr. G. W. M. Reynolds. There is a whole library of such fiction scattered broadcast by our freedom of the press. Hippolyta, better acquainted with Sophocles than with the

purveyors of 'romance for the million,' turned over the pages in silent disgust, and gave them back without remark. Mrs. Dauris, meanwhile, said to Annie with her accustomed gentleness:

'You can come and sit here in a few moments, my dear, when Mrs. Malcolm and I have finished what we are saying. There is something I want to tell the lady.'

'About me, I suppose,' returned Annie with great quickness, her cheeks lighting up and then turning pale; 'well, I don't care. Tell as much as you like, and I will tell my side of the story if I am asked.' And away she went, attempting, for the sake of bravado, to hum the notes of a comic street-song under her breath, but not succeeding in getting through it. On the contrary, when she reached the back-kitchen again and sat down by the ironing-board, such a sense of wretchedness overcame the unhappy girl that she burst into a fit of sobbing, and rocked herself to and fro in agony. She was miserable indeed; far more so than she would have dared to let her mother know or any human creature.

But, a few days later, she told as much of 'her own side of the story' as she judged expedient, sitting in Mrs. Malcolm's boudoir, and in answer to the question which that lady put to her in the words, 'Tell me, Annie, who is Mr. Maurice Regan?'

'Ah, mother told you his name that afternoon I was ironing, when she wouldn't let me sit in the parlour,' cried Annie; 'but I should have told you

myself, all the same.' Maurice Regan is the gentleman you saw me talking with. He is—I mean—I am——'

She was confused and could get no further. Hippolyta came to her aid.

'You mean to say he is your lover. But when I passed you were quarrelling, I thought.'

Annie looked down at her work. 'Yes, we were,' she said; 'but it was only a lovers' quarrel. Maurice adores me, and I adore him.'

'And was he asking you to do something you didn't like?' inquired Mrs. Malcolm, who thought she had better let Annie tell the story her own way piecemeal.

'No, it was not that,' replied the girl. 'I wanted him to take me away. I did,' she repeated, as if in answer to the look of sorrow and astonishment on the lady's countenance. 'I hate staying at home. Father makes it so miserable. And I hate him,' she concluded vehemently.

Hippolyta put her hand on the wicked lips of the child, saying softly, 'My dear, my dear, don't utter such wrong words. Your father is a good man, and he loves you.'

'Why did he beat me then?' cried Annie in a shrill voice, pushing away the gentle hand which would fain have stilled her irreverence. 'He shall not have the chance of beating me long, I can tell him.' She spoke loud, as if there was some one in the next room that would hear what she said. Hippolyta was

more grieved than shocked. How to bring back so wayward a being to the sense of duty?

'I suppose,' she said after a pause, when Annie had had time to reflect, and had begun to fear the consequences of speaking out loud in such a grand room and before such a fine lady as Mrs. Malcolm, 'I suppose your father wanted to break you off being out late at night, in the streets. You cannot blame him for that.'

'Yes, I can,' said Annie, her spirit rising again; 'I wasn't doing anything. Why shouldn't I go about like other girls, instead of moping indoors? If I had always kept in the house I shouldn't have come to know a soul at Cousin Harriet's. Maurice says father was cruel to beat me, and he hates him too.'

'But why do you like running about after dark, Annie?' It was Hippolyta's purpose to probe as deeply, and yet as delicately as she could, into the mind of this rebellious creature, and to discover, if possible, a remedy for the unhappiness she was causing herself and others. Annie did not hesitate. She replied:

'I do like it, and I always did. If I stay with father and mother, it is all reading good books and talking as the priest does in church. I cannot stand it. I like doing as I like. Why should I be different from the other girls? They talk and sing and dance with their young men, and go to music halls, and they have nice things to eat and drink, and some of them don't work at all——' She stopped. She

was going a step too far in her confidences, as she could perceive, being quick enough in her way, by the growing paleness of Mrs. Malcolm's cheek.

'Yes,' said Hippolyta in a low voice, 'there are thousands that never put their hand to anything useful. Would you wish to be one of them, you poor ignorant child?' She turned a wistful glance towards Annie. That young lady, but little abashed, made answer:

'I need not be one of them, if I can get Maurice to take me with him. He has plenty of money and a beautiful house, with servants, and horses, and carriages——'

'Then you have seen the house?' said Mrs. Malcolm, interrupting her; 'and it was there you went when your father and mother lost you, before Miss Thatchford took you into her service?' While she spoke Annie was listening attentively, but she would not answer for some time. She seemed to be turning over a resolution in her mind. Once and again she studied the lady's expression with a sharpness beyond her years, until at last, being apparently satisfied, she said somewhat less impetuously than usual:

'If you would not let anybody know that I asked, I should like—oh, you are such a good lady, I know you will help a poor girl in distress. It is no use telling father or mother, it will only make things worse. Do let me say it all to you, in confidence, as if I was going to confession. Please, will you, ma'am?' She was very imploring. Hippolyta considered.

Annie would keep her secret, as she had kept it hitherto, unless the promise was made that it should go no further. And might it not be the girl's salvation for one of her own sex to become in this way her guardian?

'Very well,' said Hippolyta at length. 'I promise not to repeat what you are going to say, unless it is the only way to save you from the danger you have run into.'

'It will not be the only way,' she replied, 'as you will see when I give you the account. But you do promise?' Hippolyta repeated the assurance. Annie became very thoughtful, and broke down several times in trying to begin. It was with great difficulty that at last she said in a broken voice:

'When you saw me and Maurice we *were* quarrelling. I own it now, because I want some one to help me so badly. He went away in a passion, and I haven't—I haven't seen him since, and I don't know where he lives, and it is like being alive and yet screwed down in a coffin to live as I have been living all these weeks.' She gasped for breath and words failed her, as she put down the skirt she was working upon in a helpless way. She looked not only miserable, but ill and feverish.

'But surely,' said Hippolyta, moved with great commiseration towards her, and forgetting the circumstances which would have seemed to make this turn of events desirable, 'if he loves you, he will come again.'

'I don't know, I don't know,' sobbed Annie. 'He

did come, twice, to see me in the lane, and when he began each time he was ever so kind and affectionate; but he got angry as soon as I asked him to take me from my wretched home. He said he was not ready, and I ought to wait and not be such a trouble. And then, when I began to press him a good deal more, he was so out of temper that he turned his back and walked away as fast as possible, and he would not come back when I called and ran after him. And he does not write or anything. What shall I do?' she cried wildly. 'If I cannot find him again I shall go clean out of my mind.'

'And you have no address, no means of writing to him?' inquired Mrs. Malcolm, her heart touched at the sight of distress which it had evidently cost an extreme effort not to show at the cottage, in the presence of the unhappy girl's parents. What a mockery was the so-called love of this Maurice Regan!

'There never was any address, and I haven't got a morsel of his handwriting,' said Annie with reluctance. 'We used to meet him, when I was with Cousin Harriet, at the Oxford or the Metropolitan, or wherever he sent word to Charlotte Fraser. Afterwards Charlotte and I didn't speak, but he would wait till I came out of the workroom in the evening, and come up as I was going home, and tell me where to meet him later.' She paused.

'But when last you left home, was it not to go to him?' Hippolyta felt she must ask this question.

Annie's thoughts seemed to wander while she was answering.

'I couldn't stay quiet,' she said, 'that was why I ran away. I wanted to see Maurice; and though he knew I lived out here, he did not come as I thought he would. So I made up my mind to go and look for him at the old places where we used to meet. I had some money he gave me; but I was hardly certain whether his right name even was what he said. Only I did love him, and I do still; and I don't care what he does, I shall always be faithful to him.' The tone of intense gravity with which Annie uttered these words, coming in the midst of real and undisguised trouble, would have amused Hippolyta at another time. Annie Dauris believed in the mock-heroic, and had no doubt practised it diligently. She must be fancying herself just then one of the distressed damsels whose abandonment by their lovers made the middle chapters—as it were the third and fourth acts—of those melodramas in prose which were the staple of her reading. But, unluckily, all the wretchedness was real; and the melodramatic winding-up was yet in the far distance, if it would ever come at all.

'Did you find him in the old places?' was Hippolyta's next question.

'Not for several nights, I didn't. I went all about, but I couldn't ask any one. I thought of waiting for Charlotte Fraser, but I was not going to give her the laugh over me; and I didn't know but he might have gone back to her, just for amusement,

because he always told me he had not cared a bit about Charlotte. No more he had, I am sure. And I did see him at last, one night, as he was coming out of the Oxford. I ran to him and he seemed very glad. He called a cab and told me to get in, and gave the cabman the address, but I couldn't catch it.'

'Did he go with you?' said Hippolyta, waiting for the answer.

Annie did not return her glance, but answered quietly, 'No, he didn't go with me. And I wouldn't stay when I got there, late as it was. I got out of the cab and waited near the house a good many hours, until it began to rain. And he never came; and I was so desperate I went back all the way in the rain, and I don't know what I did the next days. I was mad, I think. It was after that Mrs. Wardlaw found me and took me to Miss Thatchford. And then the meetings began again, for I could get out unobserved, and this time I went to Charlotte Fraser's and we made it up. She did not care for him either. She had got somebody else, and she told him so,—better off, as she said, than he would ever be; but it was all brag, I daresay. But still, all the same, she was not jealous, and we used to meet one another sometimes at the house where she lived. That is one of the reasons why I never had Maurice's address. But I must get it now, or I shall do something to myself. Do you think he is gone for good? Oh, don't say that you think so.'

'I don't know,' answered Hippolyta very slowly, and

as if some unseen power were putting the words on her unwilling lips. 'Would it not be the best for both of you?'

'But I tell you, dear lady,' cried Annie, in her desperation, rising to her feet, 'that we love one another; I know we do. It is as sure as God is in heaven. He told me again and again that he was never happy without me; he counted the minutes till I came. And I am never happy when he is away,' she said, falling back into her chair. 'Oh, if you know what it is to be wild with love, and to pine and die because you can't be near the man your heart is set on, do help me to find Maurice again. If I only knew where to write I would go down on my knees and thank you. He would be sure to come when I told him I was dying for the sight of his face once more.'

She was pitiably in earnest now, not melodramatic. Hippolyta, divided between her early feelings and the rapidly growing conviction that, love or no love, Maurice Regan was a scoundrel, did not know how to reply. She sat in front of the hysterical, passionate girl in silence, dismayed and terrified, unable to put forth a syllable which should express her feelings. But where intellect failed the heart knew its way. Rising and going near to Annie, she drew the unfortunate child to her breast, and while Annie wept the bitter, hopeless tears of disappointed affection, Hippolyta mingled her own with them. For a while there was no other sound in the room. Then, lifting her face to the lady whose arms were clasping her, Annie said

in a whisper, 'Do, please, find out the address for me. Hippolyta shook her head sorrowfully. She was still undecided whether she ought to encourage any hope in that direction. What made her at last say, in almost as low a whisper as Annie's, the words that she had dreamt would never have passed her lips? Was it an inspiration, or was it a surrender? She did not know. The sentence was short and simple enough. She said, 'But, Annie, would Mr. Regan ever marry you?'

The words were no sooner out of her mouth than she coloured from brow to chin; a deep swarthy hue accompanied with a burning sense of shame overspread her whole countenance, her eyes filled with hot tears, and, unclasping Annie's arms, she went hastily towards a table that stood in a dark corner of the room, as though searching for something. Annie, on the point of replying, was startled into silence. What had come over the lady? Was she suddenly taken ill? That, perhaps, was the explanation, for Mrs. Malcolm, after moving the ornaments about which lay on the carved wood table, returned with a richly-chased flask of sal-volatile, which she opened, and sprinkling some on her handkerchief put it to her forehead.

'Have you got a headache?' inquired Annie, brusquely to be sure, but not without feeling, thoughtless as she commonly was of the sufferings of any one but herself.

'It is gone now,' said Hippolyta, laying down the flask. She could not continue the conversation which

was raising so great a storm in her breast. But she must inquire of Annie what her design had been in beginning it. 'What do you want me to do?' she said, almost in the tone she would have employed towards a stranger whom she distrusted. Annie, intent on her own projects, did not observe it.

'I want Maurice's address,' she answered, 'and you could get it from his brother the clergyman, Mr. Philip Regan, if you asked him, without saying who it was for. If I went to him he would perhaps give me in charge for coming about the house. At any rate he would never tell me, for he doesn't want me to know; he thinks I am Maurice's ruin. He said so that night in Dorset Square.'

'But I am not acquainted with Mr. Philip Regan,' returned Hippolyta; 'he would not be likely to tell a stranger who did not explain her purpose.'

'Oh, but you are a lady, and if you called on him the clergyman would very likely tell you anything you wanted very much to know. I can show you where he lives. He goes a good deal among the poor people in his neighbourhood. It is near Saffron Hill. I have been there; I went with Charlotte once to hear the singing at the Italian church, and as we were coming home she pointed to the other church that Maurice's brother belongs to. Maurice lives somewhere else, by himself, he told me.'

Annie was beseeching and tearful, but she did not know the difficulties that lay in Mrs. Malcolm's path, or the feelings, so entirely different from her own,

which struggled for the mastery in Hippolyta's bosom. There was the danger of an expedition into the heart of London, with all that might spring out of meeting a clergyman who, if he came so much in contact with the poor, would perhaps have heard of Colonel Valence, and might know those who would recognise Colonel Valence's daughter. But the main peril was of another kind. Had not fortune been dealing tenderly with Annie Dauris in taking away her unprincipled admirer and putting a great distance between them; and would it not be doing the girl an injury, an irreparable injury, to help towards a renewal of their acquaintance? On the other hand, she was not only foolish but stiff-necked, and more likely to run the worst risks than to give up the chance of discovering where Maurice Regan lived. With an invalid mother, and a father whose control over her was utterly at an end, she needed a friend, a counsellor, prepared to watch every step she took. 'There is none but I,' said Hippolyta to herself. 'And how can one that has assumed the character of a Mrs. Malcolm be a protection to such a girl as Annie?'

While she was turning over these things painfully in her mind, and her young companion sat looking and waiting for an answer, the street door was heard to open and close, and a step came along the hall. Hippolyta started up and threw down her work. She recognised the footfall outside. 'It is Rupert,—Mr. Malcolm,' she said in a hurried voice, and, leaving Annie, she ran out of the room. The sound of joyful exclamations

and lovers' greetings reached the girl where she sat, and brought tears of rage and envy into her eyes. Why were other women to be so happy and she so miserable? Mrs. Malcolm was good, but she could have hated Mrs. Malcolm; she hated all the world. In a few minutes Hippolyta came back, radiant, glowing with the unexpected delight of Rupert's presence. 'You must go now, my dear child,' she said, taking Annie affectionately round the neck; 'we shall not be able to do any more dressmaking to-day.'

The other, rising up to go, turned her large eyes upon Hippolyta and only replied by repeating her question, 'Will you find out for me about Maurice?'

The happy woman, rapturous at her own lover's arrival, could not be prudent or selfish then. She answered, 'If Rupert will allow me to go to Saffron Hill—if he does not think it wrong—I will call on Mr. Philip Regan, and tell you what he says.'

Annie lifted Hippolyta's hand to her lips with sudden passion, and went away.

CHAPTER XXVI

IF LOVE BE FREE?

RUPERT'S coming was not due to any sudden event, either pleasant or the reverse, at Trelingham. It was simply the escapade of a young man who is very much in love, and who discovers, or makes, in his daily pursuits an occasion for running off to the well of golden water, and there taking long draughts of felicity when no one is looking. As soon as the feeling of Hippolyta's presence which he carried with him into the West Country from Forrest House grew dim, a devouring melancholy seized upon him, a longing for which there was no anodyne, a weariness of all things which did not remind him of the maid of his heart, and a fever which seemed to infect him when he touched any trifle she had handled or come near. He wrought then like a man who is aware that one day's labour will purchase seven days' enjoyment,—fiercely, furiously, with his genius concentrated in every stroke, and a haste that is possible

only to a spirit set on fire. He never painted so admirably; it was the passage of the beautiful, swift lightning over the face of a landscape, lambent, not destructive, adding a divine, an incomprehensible splendour to the colours and shapes of every day. But no sooner had he reached a stage where, without harm to the design, he could pause, than some attraction powerful as the magnet drew him to London. Now it was the need of refreshing his imagination by studying the great pictures—on which, in passing, he bestowed a glance, and hurried away from them to Hippolyta. Now it was an interview with some old friend who would be gone in a week, and whom he must therefore catch on the wing. But when he did catch him, Rupert seemed preoccupied, amazed, drowned in reverie, not equal to conversation, though capable of sudden speeches whose poetry and grace were so remarkable that even those who had anticipated wonders from their brilliant acquaintance, felt in him something original and undreamt of hitherto. Or it would be the need of rare and curious ingredients for his palette, which no one could choose but himself; or of the learning on the subject of King Arthur which was locked up in out-of-the-way books. It was something or nothing, and the French philosopher who invented 'occasional causes' would have smiled in his grave to find such a powerful demonstration of them in Rupert Glanville's comings and goings.

But the beginning, the middle, the end of the story

was Hippolyta and ever Hippolyta. 'Thine eyes are lodestars,' he would say, with the infantine plagiarism of lovers who think that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* were indited for their particular use. To arrive unexpectedly; to rush into the presence of Hippolyta palpitating with eagerness and the haste of his long expedition; to dine *tête-à-tête* amid the antique curiosities and delicate English comfort of that red brick mansion in whose oak-panelled rooms the ghost of his great-aunt, trailing her silks and laces, and shocked out of her propriety (even as a well-informed spectre) by the sight of such romantic love-making, was perhaps still wandering after nightfall; to discourse of ten thousand nothings as if they had infinite importance, making them the strings on which love's sweet voluntary was played; to laugh and be serious and move with sudden flight into the fiery empyrean, Love seeming all the while to hold the secret of life, and existence so abounding in joy that for very excess it was transmuted into pain; to be wrapt in the flame of another's being and to feel all one's faculties alive to their uttermost height,—what was Rupert that he should resist the spell or put from him the overwhelming ecstasy of these things, and be content with a work-a-day world which glared upon him, hot and dusty, when Hippolyta was not there? Again and again he fled to his enchanted island. He was lost, rapt out of the sphere of things beneath the moon; he had broken through hedge and thicket, through thorn and brier,

into the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, and, oh joy and wonder! it had only a single tenant who waked when his eyes were bent down upon her, and lived upon the breath of his lips. The tumultuous company of king and chancellor, of knights and serving-men, and all their noisy array, had sunk into a deep sleep, out of which, for his part, he desired never to awaken them. Why should not he and Hippolyta go on, loving and being loved, in the secrecy which increased their happiness a thousand-fold and kept friends—those worst of foes—at a distance? 'We do not want the palace to wake up, do we, Princess?' he said to her playfully as they were walking up and down the central path of the garden once more. No, Hippolyta would have left them gladly to their slumbers. But she had a question to ask. Might she call on Mr. Philip Regan?

It was not without blushing on her side, and a good deal of laughter from Rupert, that she contrived to get her question out. And who was Mr. Philip Regan, if he might be so bold as to inquire, demanded Rupert in turn. A clergyman? Oh, indeed! And so Hippolyta wanted to see a clergyman, after all. She had come round, then, from her obstinacy; she had begun to think marriage in a duly licensed building not so wicked as it appeared a few months ago. Well, he had no objection. But, half in shame and the least bit inclined to be angry with her adored Rupert, she answered no, it was not as he supposed, and, if he would promise to keep quiet and not laugh

at her, she would tell him. The artist, however, was in that mood of abounding joy which the old wise Greeks thought unseemly for a mere creature of a day, whose happiness might be blown to dust by the passing wind, and which they esteemed the forerunner of Nemesis. He was quite sincere in declaring that he would marry Hippolyta when she pleased; but if that was not her motive in seeking a clergyman,—if, as seemed probable, it rose out of her enthusiasm for the poor of the neighbourhood, he would neither meddle nor mar, in accordance with the resolution he had taken at the outset. What did she want of Mr. Regan? Hippolyta, somewhat confused by his previous jesting, could not answer in a moment; she hardly knew whether, in seeing Maurice Regan's brother, she intended to thwart Annie's wishes or to forward them. And the confidence which, on this seemingly unimportant subject, might have been established between herself and Rupert was made impossible by his fit of light-mindedness. Instead, therefore, of telling him Annie Dauris's story, she contented herself with saying that Mr. Regan had it in his power to assist the family of the gardener in whom she had taken an interest; but that it was a long way to Saffron Hill, and she had not been able to decide on risking a drive into the heart of London. All this sounded very like what Glanville had anticipated. He would have been alarmed had she spoken of visiting a fashionable preacher at the West End; but Mr. Regan was not

known to him by name and could not be famous, while any chance of discovery in such a region as Saffron Hill was not to be imagined. He had implicit faith in Hippolyta, and, merely renewing his stipulation that she should not enter a place where there was risk of infection, and should withhold her address from Mr. Regan, he gave his consent. How seldom we know which of the cards we are holding in our hand will win or lose the game! To Glanville the clergyman was nobody; and Annie Dauris was not even a name; yet, if he could have been more sober amid the enchantments of that evening, if the frolic laughter of a spirit unbent had been kept in check, he might have discerned that Hippolyta, though no longer melancholy, was meditative, and after a new fashion.

More than once during those days Annie passed by the garden-gates; but, always seeing Mr. Malcolm, she did not venture in. She knew that Mrs. Malcolm would be kind, she was never anything else; but, so long as her husband stayed, there was no hope of her leaving Forrest House for an instant. How long, then, would he stay? To Annie it was a matter of life and death. Hippolyta, meanwhile, was like a water-lily floating in its dream of beauty on the tranquil waves, her thoughts absorbed, her feelings strung to their highest pitch of intensity, her sadness gone, as Rupert perceived, and her attachment to the beloved becoming more and more a part of her existence. What could she desire that was lacking? News of

her father's whereabouts? Yes, it was strange he did not write or send a message to Falside. But she resolutely put that trouble away from her, like one who is on a voyage and knows that months must elapse ere he can reach the home he has quitted, or need take up again the cares he has left behind. In the midst of such a vast expanse of happiness around her, it was not difficult to forget the past or to paint the future in hues of Paradise. Three or four days of perfect love, cloudless and serene; so many hours during which the heart was steeped in bliss, the imagination laughing and gay in its fairy visions—hours at once long as eternity, swift as thought, and like some momentary crisis that can never be blotted from the memory,—were they over so soon, and was Rupert to be spirited away once more to that Hall of Frescoes where she saw him, in his artist costume, beautiful and strange as a god, not hers, but dedicated to another service? Yes, they were over; but she must not sit down to weep. Why should tears be the price of that happiness? She would help some one else to be happy; she would take charge of Annie Dauris, since there was no creature near who deserved her attention better, none whose rescue would bring so much joy to the good people whom she had found worthy of her affection. When Annie came next to the gate Mr. Malcolm was gone; and on inquiry she learnt that Mrs. Malcolm had set out soon after him, and would not be back till evening. But the housekeeper did not know that Hippolyta

had resolved on a visit to Saffron Hill. It was to be a secret from Annie, unless good was certain to come from telling her.

Hippolyta, meanwhile, though acquainted with London in her frequent journeyings to and from abroad with Colonel Valence, was not at home in the purlieus of the Italian quarter, and she had some difficulty in finding her way. It was no part of her intention to disclose whence she had come to Mr. Regan, and accordingly she sent back the carriage to Forrest House when it had conveyed her a couple of miles in the direction of London. Walking some distance along the high road, she engaged the first cab that came towards her, and had herself driven to Hyde Park Corner. There she alighted again, turned down two or three streets, hired a second cab, and was taken, according to her directions, within a short distance of the church that Annie had pointed out as the one to which Mr. Philip Regan belonged. It was shut, as most London churches are on week-days, or as at least they seem to be when one passes by; and this, in particular, had a padlock on its rusty gate. Hippolyta looked round for the clergy-house. There was no building near that corresponded with her rather vague idea of what such a residence should be: the surroundings were poor and squalid; the people she saw going in and out of the various houses were emphatically 'low'—that is to say, not only poverty-stricken, but brutish-looking;—and though many of the houses were large and of massive

construction, their general appearance was one of such pervading filth, misery, discomfort, and, she would have said, of such engrained wickedness, that she felt sure no minister of a Gospel dwelt in any of them. She bethought herself of reading the notices which were posted up on the church door, behind the rusty grating. They dealt with the things of this world, with dog taxes and carriage licenses—the latter absurdly out of place in a quarter which was traversed only by cabs in their flight east and west, or by great drays and butchers' or costermongers' carts. The only carriages likely to be seen within a large radius of St. Audry's Church were, said Hippolyta to herself, the hearse and mourning-coach of the undertaker. Parochial announcements, too, stared her in the face; but it would seem that in the modern significance a parish was not the fountain of heavenly grace to those who dwelt within its borders, so much as a corporate body bent on exacting two shillings in the pound under severest threats from the subjects over which it ruled. On other sheets were published the hours of service and the amount of the Sunday collection, distributed in columns according to the silver and copper pieces of which it was made up. In a corner of the last Hippolyta read the address of the churchwardens; but, so far as she could conjecture, these gentlemen abode at a distance, and the morning would be spent in seeking either of them. Were the clergy always so difficult to discover? She had thought of them as making a part of the buildings

in which they officiated, but it would seem she was mistaken. What should she do next?

The way in which Colonel Valence had educated his daughter led to her being, in the presence of a trifling embarrassment like this, wild and shy. Clergymen were so closely bound up with that huge imposture called the social organism that Hippolyta, in endeavouring to find one of them, had something of the feeling which possesses a recruit who enters for the first time on a field of battle. She was excited and, perhaps it will be doing her no great injustice to add, slightly afraid. The medieval superstition which made men begin a story with the solemn announcement, 'in those days the devil walked openly in the streets of Heidelberg,' was paralleled to a certain extent by Hippolyta's shuddering reflection that she, a daughter of the Revolution, had come in search of that reverend vice, that sage iniquity, which, in the person of Mr. Philip Regan, was then stalking abroad through the streets of London. But she must find him; and after some hesitation, she entered one of the nearest houses, the door of which stood open, and knocked timidly. There was no answer for a time, but the scudding of children's feet was heard behind the partition, and by and by a room door opened and a tall, slatternly woman came out. She listened impatiently to Hippolyta's questions, eyeing her elegantly-dressed visitor with marked disdain; for there is the pride of Diogenes trampling on the pride of Plato in many an

unkempt and ragged woman, when she brushes against another of her sex in silk attire. The only answer this virago made was that if the stranger would give Susan a penny, Susan would show the way to Mr. Regan's. Hippolyta was willing to give Susan many pence when she saw the pale-faced little thing, with her miserable frock reaching hardly to her knees, and an old straw bonnet on her head as much too large for her as the shabby frock was too small. The slatternly woman, among whose goods and chattels Susan was evidently reckoned, told her daughter in a loud voice to show where Mr. Regan lived and come home straight when she had done so instead of playing in the gutter. Hippolyta spoke a word or two of kindness to the child, but she did not seem to notice it, and went on before, her head hanging a little on one side and her feet finding the way mechanically. It was no distance. In a side street about five hundred yards from St. Audry's stood the small, dingy-looking house in which Mr. Regan had set up his modest establishment as a bachelor or celibate clergyman. Hippolyta kept the child with her till the bell was answered. A decently-attired elderly woman came to the door, and, in reply to inquiries, informed Hippolyta that Mr. Regan was out on his usual morning round; that it was uncertain when he would come in, and that if her business was pressing the only chance of transacting it at once would be to follow the clergyman on his beat, which was fairly regular, and catch him as he went from

house to house. Seeing the little girl by Hippolyta's side, the good woman gave her some particular indications as to the quarter of the parish Mr. Regan was visiting; and Susan, with the sharpness of her sex and bringing up, nodded intelligently and set out afresh, nothing loth to guide Hippolyta on her travels. Questions put at diverse points of their pilgrimage elicited the information that the minister had been seen a few minutes previously going into a house in what I will call Denzil Lane,—for the true name is too well known. Here, then, Hippolyta dismissed Susan after giving her a little more than she had promised.

It was a fine old street was Denzil Lane, with noble but shamefully dilapidated houses, once the mansions of illustrious families, on both sides, interspersed with miserable tenements huddled one against another and in the last stages of decomposition. The house to which Hippolyta was shown had a large entrance-hall and magnificent oak staircase, which were both dimly lighted from a great window on the first landing, every third pane of which was broken, and the rest discoloured with smoke and festooned with antique cobwebs. Throughout the building one might catch the sound of voices in the different rooms and the movement of a numerous life, for it was densely populated from the cellars, which lay in darkness under Hippolyta's feet, to the roof that covered in a multitude of dismal attics. Knocking gently at the door on her left hand, Mrs. Malcolm

inquired again for the whereabouts of this troublesome Mr. Regan. This time she received a civil answer from the woman who appeared on the threshold. 'Yes, Mr. Regan is upstairs, in the first floor front, but he may be there a long while. He always stays when he finds Mr. Mardol here.'

Hippolyta looked at her in astonishment on hearing the name. Could it be Ivor Mardol? What was he doing at such a time in such a place? 'Does Mr. Mardol live in this house?' she demanded, anxious to hear further about him.

'Oh no,' was the reply; 'Mr. Mardol is a good charitable gentleman, as well known in all the neighbourhood as Mr. Regan himself. They often meet in this way.' And the civil, talkative woman proceeded to express her wonder that they agreed as they did, and that they never had high words between them, considering that Mr. Mardol, like Mr. Minns, the tailor upstairs whom he visited, was an infidel, and Mr. Regan not only was a clergyman, but wore vestments on Sundays.

This was decisive. 'It must be the same,' said Hippolyta to herself. But how extraordinary that, in making inquiries about a stranger like Mr. Regan, she should have come upon the man whom she had been instrumental in sending away from the Hermitage, and whose absence, during those eventful weeks, had determined the course of her whole life! Should she endeavour to see and talk with him? He might be able to tell her something of her father. But, on

the other hand, she had never learnt, or indeed cared to learn, by what name Colonel Valence was known, if known he personally was, to Ivor Mardol. While she was debating in her own mind, a door opened above and some one began to descend the stairs quietly. 'Ah,' said the woman, 'Mr. Mardol is coming. He has left the clergyman behind.' It was impossible for Hippolyta in the obscurity of the entrance to discern more than the figure of a young man coming down the stairs. But as he drew near and the light from outside fell upon his face, she uttered a cry of amazement, and went back some paces, almost into the street. Her own face, which had been in deep shade, was now lighted up in turn; and Ivor Mardol, for it was he, startled on hearing the voice and hastening to discover who it might be, when he saw Hippolyta paused, and for an appreciable space of time looked at her fixedly without saying a word. They both offered a picture of surprise and astonishment. Hippolyta was the first to recover. She held up her hand in a peculiar way. Ivor grasped it, let it fall, and whispered the only words he had yet thought of addressing to this strange young lady. She replied in the like whisper, adding aloud, 'I know your name, Mr. Mardol, though we have never met before.'

He drew her back into the dark entrance. 'You are one of ours,' he said; 'have you come with a message for me?' He was calm, but exceedingly grave in voice and manner. No, she told him, their

meeting was accidental; she had intended to find Mr. Regan. Then, remembering what she had heard from the woman who was standing by, and who had viewed their introduction of themselves to one another with great admiration, Hippolyta asked him whether he knew Mr. Regan intimately.

'As intimately,' answered Mardol, 'as one knows a boy that has been at school with one. Mr. Regan and I were in the same class at ——. We were not friends, however, and not enemies. Naturally, on leaving school we went our several ways, but when he came to work in these parts our orbits crossed again, and we are often in the way of meeting. If you wish to speak to Mr. Regan I will ask him to come down. What name shall I say?'

'Wait a moment,' answered Hippolyta; 'perhaps I need not speak to him. Tell me, do you know his brother, Mr. Maurice Regan? My business concerns him rather than the clergyman.'

Ivor considered before replying. He scanned the unknown visitor from head to foot, looked down, and said in a serious tone, 'I hope, my dear young lady, if I may take such a liberty, that it is no personal interest which prompts you to inquire for Maurice Regan. He is a dangerous man.'

'You do know him, then!' she exclaimed, 'and you can help me. But why do you call him dangerous? You confirm my suspicions.'

'He is one of ours, too,' said Ivor, with a look of mingled pain and displeasure; 'one by whom we

shall gain little credit. If you will tell me why you are looking for him, I in turn will tell you all I know about him.'

'Most willingly,' said Hippolyta; 'but where can we speak? This place is too public and we shall be interrupted.'

'I will arrange that,' he replied. 'Here, Mrs. Scruton,' turning to the civil person, who was still at her door, 'have you the key of the committee-room? I want to show it to this lady.' Mrs. Scruton, after a minute or two of searching, handed him a large key, and he beckoned Hippolyta to follow him along the hall. When they were quite in the gloom of the staircase Ivor found a door on their right which no eyes, save those accustomed to the darkness, would have perceived. The key turned easily in the lock, and they entered a vast but desolate apartment which may have served in happier days for a drawing-room, though now it was bare of all that could make it pleasant or habitable. Some wooden benches were ranged along the walls; a table covered with moth-eaten baize stood at one end and beside it a wooden arm-chair, which Ivor presented to Hippolyta. She would have begged him to be seated, but there was not another chair visible. He laughed and drew one of the benches forward, and seating himself at a respectful distance from her, said in a low, earnest voice, 'Begin.'

Sympathy is never a matter of words, nor can the utmost eloquence so easily convey an assurance of it

as the tone, the look, which expressing that something in us that lies deeper than speech, are powerful enough to create in an instant the warm, comfortable atmosphere in which we disclose our very soul to the listener. So was it now with Ivor and Hippolyta. By a subtle, instant process she knew that she had found a friend, and Ivor knew equally well that the young lady in whose presence he sat, and whose every word and motion had the highest distinction, was sincere, unworldly, and simply intent on doing good. She unfolded to him the story, so far as she was acquainted with it, of Annie Dauris, her passionate folly and despairing love for a man who seemed to have abandoned her and gone his way. She added the dreadful suspicions which, from Annie's behaviour at their last meeting, she could not but have formed. Ivor listened without interrupting the recital, asked no questions till it was ended, and said merely as Hippolyta concluded, 'What did you propose to tell Mr. Philip Regan? the whole of this sad affair?'

'Yes,' said Hippolyta; 'I would have let him know everything, if he appeared to be a man of sense and judgment. If not, I would have asked him for his brother's address, and endeavoured to see him myself. Something must be done, or Annie will throw prudence to the winds and either disgrace her family or perhaps put an end to her wretched existence. She is not only giddy, but a slave of impulse.'

'Ah,' cried Ivor, standing up, 'is it not a heart-break to hear such things? Maurice Regan is one

of the thousands that join our movement under false pretences, from their hatred of moral order and discipline, not from any wish to set their brethren free and lift them higher. He is a libertine, not a Liberal; but he thinks it is all one. I remember him, too, at school,—unruly, indulgent in every way that was then possible to himself, and hard as the nether millstone to others. He has since run through a younger brother's fortune, and plunged headlong into dissipation such as London offers on all hands to the base. He is a quick writer, speaks forcibly and fluently, and has rendered services to us in the press. But though I never thought he had principle, of course I was unaware of the misery he has brought on this poor girl. And now, you say, he has cast her off.'

'Entirely, it seems, unless something can be done to unite them. I do not suppose she will ever be happy with such a man; yet anything is better than to see her good father and mother so miserable.'

'But,' said Ivor, turning his serious glance towards Hippolyta, 'what can be done? I know the man's philosophy, as he calls it. He will never marry her, for he does not believe in marriage.'

Hippolyta trembled from head to foot. A feeling of sickness came over her, and she clung to the arms of the chair to keep herself from falling. What could she say? in what way conceal her emotion? There was a difficult pause.

'No, I suppose not,' she said at last; 'but you—

I—those who accept the Revolution, the principles of '89, do we believe in marriage?'

Ivor came to her with an air of infinite distress. 'I implore you,' he said with the most intense fervour, 'tell me, assure me that this is indeed the story of a third person, that—pardon me, I am too bold—that *you* are not Annie Dauris.'

Hippolyta smiled faintly. 'No, I am not Annie Dauris,' she said, regaining the control over her voice that she had lost; 'it is another's story, not mine. I should not dare,' she went on more steadily, 'to suggest in the hearing of a clergyman like Mr. Philip Regan the view I have expressed to you. Surely, Mr. Mardol, there can be no mistake as to the teaching of *our* religion. The free union of equal men and women is incompatible with marriage. If it is not, we are riveting again the chains that were smitten asunder when the churches went down.' She could face him now, this ambiguous son of the Revolution.

'I see,' he answered imperturbably, 'you are romantic. Excuse the word. I know the feeling, for I have gone through it. How shall I convince you that you are wrong?' He seemed to be pondering the matter. Hippolyta was too proud to submit to this.

'Nay, rather,' she exclaimed, 'how convince me that you have not forsaken the very principles of liberty and equality, if you are prepared to defend the iniquitous traffic in the souls and bodies of women which goes by the name of marriage?'

'Nay, nay,' he said. 'Let us use a little patience. I will convince you, if you do not shrink from the proof.'

'I shrink from no proof,' she said, rather hotly. It was too much. And he had been so full of sympathy while she was telling her tale; she must have been deceived in the man!

'Ah, but the proof I have in view is no less appalling than to plunge your arm up to the elbow in molten iron. There is but one cure for the stage of sentimentalism in which all Revolutionists find themselves sooner or later; and that is contact with reality. It is very trying to the heart and the nerves, however good for the head.'

'I had imagined,' said Hippolyta scornfully, 'that it was contact with reality, with life, which created Revolutionists. Is not that your experience?'

'No doubt,' was his answer; 'but where many of us have mistaken, and constantly do mistake, is in being satisfied with our first knowledge, and losing touch of things when we go on to mould our philosophies, our Utopias. We look once, when we should look twice and thrice.'

'What do you understand by looking twice and thrice? Finding an excuse for the rulers of mankind and turning back to the *ancien régime?*'

'Not quite that, or I should have the courage, I hope, to declare that the Revolution and I had parted company. I mean, looking beyond to-day and to-morrow, considering what will happen when we have

pulled down what is yet standing in our way. It is not enough to establish anarchy, as our friends now appear to have resolved. We must go on to establish that which, one day or other, ought to succeed anarchy —the kingdom of justice and of human brotherhood.'

'I am still in the dark,' said Hippolyta; 'apply your doctrine of second and third thoughts to marriage. The first thought, you will allow, is Free Love; every man and woman to choose the manner, the length, and the terms of union.'

'Yes, the romantic stage; degenerating in men like Maurice Regan into the stage of libertinism. Oh, I know,' he went on, lifting his hand as if to deprecate the expression of arguments familiar to him. 'You will say the abuse of Free Love is not greater, that its dangers are even less, than the abuse of marriage. But let me finish my prologue.'

Hippolyta, who had risen in her vehemence, sat down again. Ivor continued:

'When we turn our eyes upon life, as it is and has been, we are appalled at the multiplied serfdoms which go to make it up. Church, State, family, profession, rank in the world—what are these but names of long-established, deeply-rooted servitudes from which we can escape only by going into the wilderness? The present order of things is founded upon manifest or disguised slavery. Neither those that command, nor those that obey, are free. The king wears a golden chain, the convict an iron one; but the king can have his will as little as the convict.

Yet all this heaping of serfdom upon serfdom does not end in happiness. Some internal disease appears to be eating out the vitals of civilisation; and our Socialism and Nihilism are but desperate remedies for the universal gangrene. See how far I go with your first thoughts. Is it far enough?'

'Perhaps,' answered Hippolyta; 'I will tell you when I have heard your second.'

'How wise women can be sometimes!' he said, smiling. 'I am not sure that you will like my second thoughts. They may be brought under a single axiom——'

'And that is——?'

'That man is a spiritual being, and can therefore be neither saved nor lost by a change of institutions which in their nature are mechanical. Or put it this way, man is made by character, not by laws or ordinances.'

'My dear Mr. Mardol,' cried Hippolyta, 'that is the old Christian fallacy. Do not laws create, modify, and mould character? What but a difference of institutions has made the Turk other than the German, or the Hindoo other than the Mussulman?' She would have drawn out her instances, but Ivor by a sign entreated her to pause.

'Excuse me,' he said, 'you are talking the dialect of the eighteenth century; and *that* is the old leaven of Revolutionists. We should have made further progress if we had not yielded to that fallacy, which the Nihilists begin to see through. At the root of all

institutions lies the national character. I admit that enormous changes ought to take place: I am doing what I can, as an individual, to help on the transformation. But, when all possible changes have come to pass in the outer world of law and custom, nothing will have been done unless a change has taken place in the inner world of the spirit. And now I will tell you how this bears on Free Love. We want all institutions cleared away which fetter a woman's power of saying no. We want every means bestowed upon her by which she shall come to a full freedom of choosing,—a matter with which law has hardly anything to do, and custom almost everything. But this can be provided only by a right education of women.'

'Quite so,' said Hippolyta; 'that is what I have always believed. But would you have marriage indissoluble except by the legal process that drags a woman in the mire?'

'Now you have touched my second thoughts. Are the difficulties surrounding marriage artificial, that is to say of man's making, or do they exist in the nature of things?'

'How like a Socratic question!' she said, laughing, and Ivor joined in the laughter.

'A strange sort of question in Denzil Lane, is it not?' he cried. 'But this is one of the points on which my brethren and I cannot agree. So they have excommunicated me.'

'What!' said Hippolyta, becoming serious in a

moment, 'you are jesting. It is impossible that you should speak so lightly if the thing had happened.'

'Well, it has happened. I do not wish to sail under false colours. I thought, in fact, when you disclosed to me your connection with the society, that you had brought me a message from the chiefs.'

'And that was why you looked so grave,' exclaimed Hippolyta, with compassion in every feature. 'Oh no, no, I had rather be excommunicated myself. But do tell me, if it will not distress you, how such a deplorable misunderstanding can have arisen?'

'It is no misunderstanding. In the society to which you and I belong, founded as it is on a social creed, speculative differences lead to very practical results. I must not disclose what is, after all, the secret of others; and I could not tell it now in any case. The quarrel is that deep one between the century which gave birth to the Revolution and the century which is guiding it through infancy. I believe there are difficulties—mysteries, if you like to call them so—in the nature of things, which must ever limit our aspirations towards an earthly Paradise. And I do not believe that to revolutionise all our institutions will have the effect which the brethren anticipate. As I say, the multitude are romantic and sentimental; they have not read, they will not study, the annals of the past. And they little see that when they have abolished Church, State, and family in the old forms, all three will spring up again in the new.'

'Oh, this is melancholy,' cried Hippolyta. 'I

know not if it is one degree better than my father's gloomy prognostications.'

'Who is your father, may I ask?' inquired Ivor.

Hippolyta hesitated. If Mr. Mardol were no longer on friendly terms with his old companions there might be danger in giving him the full answer. She said, therefore, in an off-hand way, to dismiss the subject, 'My father is a philosopher and inclined to be a Pessimist.' Then, with a change of tone, 'But where is your proof that conventional marriages are better than Free Love.'

'I did not say that,' he replied; 'but if you would wish—I should say rather, if you can endure—to see a world where Free Love reigns supreme and unchecked, I can assign you such guides, good and worthy persons of your own sex, as will show it you.'

'In what part of the world?' demanded Hippolyta.

'Here,' he said, 'on all sides, within a radius of a couple of miles. Have you the heart to go down into these depths? You are romantic, and naturally so, since you have dedicated your youth to the Revolution, like those passionate, intellectual women—true Sibyls and Amazons of our modern world—who lead the van in Moscow and St. Petersburg. But the young are enthusiastic without knowledge, as the old have knowledge without enthusiasm. Come and study life where it may be seen in myriad forms, all strangely, dreadfully instructive; and then tell me what you think of Free Love, Mrs.——?' he paused inquiringly.

'Mrs. Malcolm,' she said with no tremor in her accent. Yes, she would come and see things with her own eyes. 'I am not afraid of truth or reality,' was her proud declaration to him. But she must not forget Annie. 'Can you get me Maurice Regan's address?' she said, rising to go when it had been settled that she was to return and begin her voyage of exploration in three days.

'I will inquire of his brother, and let you know,' replied Ivor; 'but, if I may offer one final piece of advice, it would be that you do not communicate with your young friend until you have gone over some at least of the scenes to which you will be taken. A desperate girl is, no doubt, one of the most fearful responsibilities you could have. But, on my honour and conscience, I do not think she could do anything worse, let her do what she might, than fall again in the way of Maurice Regan. She has perhaps escaped ruin once; but that sort of miracle is too rare to be looked for a second time. But you should watch over her as well as you can.'

He took up his hat where he had laid it on the green baize table, led Hippolyta to the door, which he locked, and asked her whether she would permit him to send for a cab. The day was fine, and, thinking she had better walk a little way, she declined. Ivor Mardol watched her depart, and, with an expression on his face which betokened great pity and equal doubt as to the destiny of such a frank and determined nature, restored the key of the committee-room

to Mrs. Scruton, and went away in the opposite direction. He could not get the thought of Mrs. Malcolm out of his head that evening. Still enamoured of the lady whose bright eyes, had she been acquainted with his folly, would have scorned him at Trellingham, Ivor had only a calm, but a very sincere, interest to bestow upon any one else. He was in great trouble; his views had been altering and, as it seemed to him, enlarging for a number of years, and they had now brought him into a situation of such peril and loneliness that, but for his work among the poor, he must have sat down and eaten his heart with grief. From Hippolyta's conversation, from her way of putting what she had had to tell, he divined that there was a deep unsettlement beneath the daring opinions to which she had given utterance. Was she, like himself, ready to pass from implicit faith in the ways and principles of the Revolution to the severest criticism of them? No, not ready, far from it. But suspicions were rising up in the secret chambers of her heart and would not be lulled to sleep.

END OF VOL. II

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